

POETRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND CULTURAL IMBALANCES

**A postcolonial approach to the current situation
in Spain and France**



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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving children, Inés, Bruno and Gabriel

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Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions¹!

Franz Fanon

¹ “Ô mon corps, fait toujours de moi un homme qui s'interroge!” (Fanon 1952/2015: 213)

Summary

This research explores the availability and potential educational uses of different forms of poetry that can be read using a postcolonial approach. The focus is on contemporary France and Spain, two contexts where people with different cultural heritages coexist and need to negotiate cultural imbalances inherited from colonial and neo-colonial domination. This research highlights poetry's overlooked suitability to engage young people in the expression of cultural difference in a progressively globalized world where cultivating cross-cultural understanding and tolerance needs to be at the top of our agendas. For this reason, the dissertation includes an analysis of poems (currently available for young people) aiming to foreground the possibilities of a postcolonial reading.

I also studied similarities and divergences between the French and Spanish scenarios based on evidence gathered during a survey of the Spanish and French fields of poetry for young people and from interviews with informed agents. The survey of the field consists of the exploration of textbooks and anthologies but also the examination of poetry circulating through on-line channels. The interviews were undertaken with selected French and Spanish representatives of people currently involved in the production and dissemination of poetry for young people.

I observed that the number of poems showing connections to a postcolonial legacy was scant in the French school material and even more in the Spanish books that I examined. I also confirmed that little attention was given to oral ways to deliver poetry especially showing little regard for the oral literary practices and traditions of non-European French and Spanish speaking communities. The Spanish lack of attention to these traditions is more salient.

This contrasts with observations about non-school contexts. Spanish and French young people can nowadays easily engage with varied cultural traditions in poetry which circulate in poetry events and social media. Interviewees confirmed these observations but also raised issues about Spanish and French poetry education that need to be dealt with so as to improve school attention to mixed cultural heritages in poetry.

The main contribution to knowledge of this thesis consists in identifying the underused and unexplored educational potential of French and Spanish poetry currently available for young people that can be fruitfully approached using postcolonial lenses. The evaluation of the information gathered in this research reveals that dominant French and Spanish approaches to poetry and limited poetry repertoires hinder the visibility of some contemporary forms of poetry and restrain the effectiveness of some poetry already present in mainstream poetry corpora. However, the comparison of scenarios shows that France offers more accessible and relevant ‘places of enunciation’² than Spain does for poets to address young people. For instance, comparing contexts, French young people have easier access and more support than Spanish youth to engage with poets’ expressions of being culturally displaced.

² Gayatri Spivak writes about places of enunciation in her famous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) to describe, rather than concrete spaces, the necessary conditions for writers to make their writings public and make them sufficiently available and relevant.

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Preface

The most significant population movements that humankind has witnessed, still deeply affecting Europe, are directly related to colonisation and imperialism. This thesis pertains to an area of study that sits at the intersection between postcolonial debates about education, cultural studies, literature for young people and poetry education. It explores the availability and potential educational uses for young people of different forms of poetry that can be read using a postcolonial approach. It considers the French and Spanish contemporary contexts within an international global point of view.

One of the most widespread clichés about contemporary societies at the turn of the millenium was that the information society and expansion of communications had made the world a “global village”. The adjective global provides a sense of the worldwide scope of many contemporary phenomena but lacks precision and can be seen as a value-laden term. Transnational flows have produced an unavoidable worldwide homogenizing tendency in many aspects of culture and education. However, “transnational movements of people, capital, commodities, technologies, information and cultural forms” (Brah 2005:238) also contribute to perpetuating asymmetrical relations among peoples and cultures that affect the world at local levels.

In 2007, Martinican poets and philosophers Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, taking the opportunity of Barack Obama’s appointment to a critical international relations’ gatekeeping role, addressed an open letter to Obama

urging him to adopt a poetics³ of the relations amongst peoples in today's globalized world. They called for an embodied consciousness of a global colonial wound that continues to be reproduced in culturally imbalanced relations but needs to be debated and dealt with from a global perspective, not only locally.

Taking its cue from Glissant and Chamoiseau's understanding of the challenges of globalization, this international comparative study seeks to be framed in a world scenario that takes into account the interdependence and imbalances originated by colonial histories. This entails contesting a frequent despising of the legacies of different histories, their narratives, their myths and the problems transferred by the closest and older past.

This thesis focuses on the transmission and reception of poetry that articulates aspects of the unequal historical and sociocultural relations between peoples and cultures. The international dimension of it is aligned with a transnational debate about contemporary cultural negotiations, imbalances and tensions, not merely in terms of dominant versus dominated cultures but also in terms of forms of expression that negotiate a place in-between.

I intend to clarify, however, that this dissertation does not aim to be understood as an acceptance of colonisation and its aftermaths as the only argument of history. It would be best inscribed into 'cosmopolitan criticism', understood as a "literary critical approach which is alert to the ways in which postcolonial texts make available for scrutiny both the nature of colonial violence and the latency and desirability of cosmopolitan alternatives" (Spencer 2011: 7).

³ Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau compelled Obama to acknowledge a parallel between politics and art: "Because, if great politics are based on Relation, all art forms are too, for they both carry the cry of the world till the clearest word and the clearest song". My translation of « Car si toute politique est de Relation, tout art l'est aussi, ils portent le cri du monde jusqu'au plus clair de la parole et du chant » (2007:57).

Introduction

“The poetry work, in the whole of social values, is not dominant...but it is poetry that protects us from automatisisation, against the rust that threatens our expression of love and hate, of revolt and reconciliation, of faith and negation” (Jakobson 1973:124)⁴.

0.1. Personal motivation

Working with literature and young people in different learning environments over the past ten years, and research work for a Masters degree in language and literature teaching, linked my passion for oral transmission with my interest in literature for young people. My Masters thesis⁵ (Alonso 2011), enabled me to start researching from an academic point of view the interest of young people in some contemporary poetry related to cultural hybridization while working for a multicultural reading organization. I observed that school poetry education gives little attention to or acknowledgement of the syncretism of many French and Spanish cultural products. I focused on the responses of young people to some poetry linked to postcolonial heritages during my

⁴ My translation of: « L'œuvre poétique, dans l'ensemble des valeurs sociales, ne prédomine pas (...) Mais n'en est pas moins l'organisateur fondamental de l'idéologie (...) C'est la poésie qui nous protège contre l'automatisation, contre la rouille qui menace notre formule de l'amour et de la haine, de la révolte et de la réconciliation, de la fois et de la négation »

⁵ Unpublished thesis after which I wrote the article Alonso M.L (2012) Estado de la Cuestión sobre la Perspectiva poscolonial: Subversión de Conceptos en Literatura Infantil y Juvenil Actual. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature* 5, 1.

Masters' research, but my doctoral thesis adopts a more systematic approach by studying the availability of this poetry and by considering the point of view of cultural and educational opinion makers.

In publications and conferences in the academic field of literature for young people it seems that international dialogue across the scholarly traditions of different cultural contexts (e.g., Hispanic-Lusophone, Anglophone, Francophone) is underdeveloped. I believe that being embedded in French and Spanish languages, cultural and educational contexts, together with my standpoint researching from a British university, situates me to contribute effectively to the internationalisation of dialogues in a particularly underdeveloped area of literature for young people. This work primarily focuses on comparing poetry written in French and Spanish and disseminated in France and Spain. However, it is attentive to intercultural dimensions of poetic forms. It is written at a British university, and academic scholarship in English serves in different ways as a springboard for discussion. Consequently I maintain that this comparative project about French and Spanish cultural products for young people can be framed within wider international perspectives.

This thesis is predicated on an understanding of poetry's capacity to leave a long lasting imprint on audiences and readers. I therefore use the verb 'disseminate' to discuss the transmission and availability of poetry for young people since its etymological origin suggests an organic inspiration⁶ and a metonymic reference to a life cycle that allows poetry to be perceived as encompassing a germinating role.

⁶ In Latin *seminare* means to plant

0.2. Comparative analytical approach

This thesis explores the field of poetry for young people with regard to dialogues between different cultural traditions in each country. Each context, French and Spanish, has an intrinsic interest but the comparative axis also allows the specificities of each country's practices to come into focus more clearly, and to be evaluated in relation to each other. The research aims to highlight similarities and differences between French and Spanish educational institutions and informal learning settings. This is in line with current trends in international education research that highlight the usefulness of comparative approaches in "challenging the dominance of prevailing discourses about what is desirable and how it might be best achieved" (Broadfoot 2000:369). This study collects and analyses information from parallel cultural and educational contexts, France and Spain, "two countries whose common location within Europe and historical interconnectedness would suggest many similarities" (Broadfoot 2000: 362).

My understanding of comparative research is inspired by a "neo-comparative paradigm", as discussed by Broadfoot, which seeks alternatives to conventional models of education. Two issues characterize a neo-comparative paradigm. On the one hand, it urges comparative research in education in order to "challenge taken for granted notions of Western educational provision" (2000: 369), something taken into consideration in my examination of cultural imbalances in the production and distribution of poetry among young readers. On the other hand, this paradigm aims to promote critical reflection on how comparative research should meet the changing needs of the twenty-first century. It emphasizes the need to take into account the idea that "the formal education provision is becoming a small part of the range of learning opportunities" (*ibid*).

0.3. Research questions

Intercultural issues in literature are often associated with multilingual concerns. Poetry particularly resists translation and linguistic barriers can complicate access to poetry from diverse cultural traditions⁷. However, the evolution of languages like French and Spanish, spoken by inheritors of differentiated cultural traditions, bear witness to the variations of diverse cultural heritages, Linguistic variations constitute an important element for their literatures' vitality. It would be interesting to explore if the poetry available for young people reflects how non-European heritages energize French and Spanish literatures but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Taking into account the fact that the cultural and educational valorisation of poetry entails the recognition of its literary qualities, I examine the qualities and forms that best invite a postcolonial approach, and the kinds of challenges and experiences this approach offers for young people. For this reason the first research question examines:

1-What are the distinctive qualities of poetry written or disseminated in Spanish and French that articulates non-Spanish and non-French cultural heritages and what issues do they foreground for young audiences?

Another objective of my thesis is to explore how poetry that can be approached using postcolonial lenses finds expression in poetry forms and channels available for young readers aged 11-18 in the French and Spanish contexts. I explore the degree to which this poetry is represented in a sample of mainstream school syllabuses and poetry anthologies but also in environments

⁷ "The poets who seem to their linguistic communities to be the most "poetic" of all, are often precisely those whom it is most difficult to bring over into another language" (Davis 2004: 310)

where poetry features outside of the classroom⁸. For this reason the second research question is:

2-To what extent is this body of poetry represented within Spanish and French poetry that is currently available for young people?

Recognizing the importance of different strategies that can be deployed to engage young people and foster their understanding and enjoyment of poetry, I also obtained information about current cultural interventions and pedagogies that could promote young people's engagement with poetry that enact the articulation of differentiated (and sometimes colliding) cultural traditions. The third question is:

3- What kind of cultural interventions and pedagogical strategies can support and encourage young people's engagement with these texts?

The issue of whether current cultural and educational interventions or strategies actually promote or hinder young people's engagement with poetry is a complex issue. For this reason, a secondary aim was to develop discussion about the conditions that might encourage consciousness about cultural differences in poetry with those experts responsible for its production and dissemination. Discussion about cultural and educational conditions included reflecting on normative beliefs about what is considered desirable and how it is achieved with regards to poetry for young people and with regards to an education for cultural diversity.

⁸ The body of poetry that I explore in my PhD work takes into account both a formal educational context and also other settings/channels that young people use to engage with poetry outside the school context. My investigation is supported in poetry searches of officially sanctioned school poetry and poetry for young people that is not usually approached in school teaching.

0.4. Research design

The research is framed within postcolonial debates, in the intersection between literature for young people, cultural studies and poetry education. The study is articulated through the interaction of three elements

1) Selection and analyses of a small sample of poems currently available for young people to identify key characteristics which are distinctive to the poetry I am investigating. Rather than focusing on postcolonial poetry as a socio-literary category, I focus on a postcolonial approach to poetry that shares certain characteristics. This will be illustrated through an analysis of poems, designed to bring out features that are often occluded when the poems are viewed out of context.

2) An investigation into which poems are available (and how they are made available) to young people in the respective countries both inside and outside formal education contexts. This encompasses investigating what poems with a postcolonial orientation are available for young people in different contexts, and what proportion or significance of the poems offer articulate non-European cultural heritage. It is organized in two stages, first searching for poetry in school education and then searching outside formal education. This entails exploring textbooks and anthologies but also exploring on-line channels and exchanging information with relevant actors and organizations involved in France and Spain in the dissemination of poetry among young people.

The information generated is mixed. On the one hand it comprises a collection of poetry information, namely lists of poems, names of poems, links with videos of poems and whole poems texts. On the other hand it brings

together varied viewpoints from people engaged in poetry for young people. These emerged from communications with relevant agents and organizations (prior to interviews) and from observations collected in a research journal that documented my poetry search (e.g., about my attendance at events like book fairs).

3) Interviews with experts (key informants) who have responsibilities within the institutional apparatus for the dissemination of poetry amongst young people.

The development of this third methodological element entailed the selection of representative French and Spanish agents who are currently involved in the selection, production and distribution of poetry among young people. The information generated consists in interview transcripts. The interviews sought to understand the positions of the interviewees with regard to the priorities, attitudes and concerns that guide their selections of poetry and of cultural interventions or pedagogical approaches to poetry for young readers.

Relationship between the three elements, the research questions and the different types of information generated by the investigation

RQ1: What are the distinctive qualities of poetry written or disseminated in Spanish and French that articulates non-Spanish and non-French cultural heritages and what issues do they foreground for young audiences?

RQ2: To what extent is this body of poetry represented within Spanish and French poetry that is currently available for young people?

RQ3: What kind of cultural interventions and pedagogical strategies can support and encourage young people's engagement with these texts

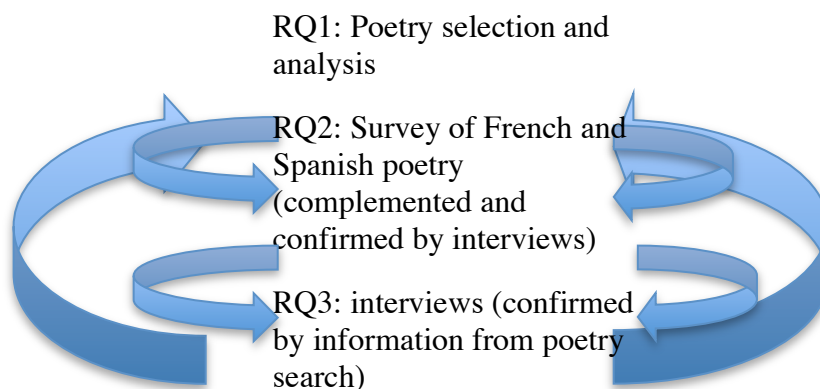


Figure 1

The information gathered in this research is mainly qualitative. The analysis of poems has only a qualitative focus. However, some information from surveying the field can be considered quantitative since it allows measuring the significance of certain data (poems that are interesting for this research) within the total number of poems found while surveying the field.

The investigation of RQ2 about poetry availability is put in dialogue with the expressed views of interviewees. In its turn, the literary analysis and contextualization of exemplary poems (RQ1) can most effectively be inscribed within necessary debates about poetry for young people and education in cultural diversity if it is contrasted and complemented with information obtained in interviews about decisions and ideas that lead to the selection of poetry and teaching strategies for young people.

Also the quantitative and qualitative information emerging from the survey of the field (e.g., information in school syllabuses and anthologies) concerning pedagogical strategies and cultural interventions (RQ3) is complemented and confirmed with information from interviews.

0.5. Timeline

This timeline maps the time that was allocated to different stages of work. The different steps are not clearly separable as they were interdependent as my analyses needed to be continuous and recursive.

January/May 2014: Searching for poetry

In January and February 2014 I was occupied with selecting poetry from anthologies and textbooks. From February to May 2014 I concentrated on performed poetry venues and networks. This stage entailed much social

networking since this selection was carried out in close contact with Spanish and French organisations and key actors in the children's literature scene.

During the summer of 2014 I selected a final set of poems to be explored and exposed in more detail. I implemented a first analysis of a few selected poems.

March/October 2014: Selecting interviewees and doing interviews

In March and April 2014 I started contacting people that I could meet in book fairs and a few poetry events (e.g., slam poetry Lille). I attended Paris book fair and Bologna international children's literature fair. These events gathered potentially interesting key informants in the same locations. There I contacted several French and Spanish editors and reading organizations. This allowed me to arrange interviews.

From May to October 2014 I conducted the interviews. The initial plan was to do the interviews in two months (May and June) but the availability of interviewees and my financial capacity determined the real schedule.

November 2014/Easter 2015: Analysis

During this time I transcribed interviews, selected, coded and translated the most interesting parts.

May 2015/ October 2016: Writing thesis

I dedicated this time to analysing and working on the information gathered and to writing up my PhD dissertation, submitted on November the 30th.

Chapter 1. Poetry and young people. The French and Spanish contexts

1.1 Poetry and young people

Poems are short but intense texts particularly relevant for encouraging young people's critical reflection about cultural norms and cultural perspectives. Poetry with regard to adolescents is studied here within the field of literature for young people. However, poetry that youths engage with in school is neither children's poetry or intentionally appropriated by young people. As happens with children's poetry, it is adults' ideas about education, childhood, youth and poetry, which determined what is made available for adolescents



Illustration 1. This strip from Peanuts' cartoon is used by Alain Gloding to question "who has told and tells whom which poems to like; about how, where, why and on what grounds they have done and do so; and about who and what gets left in the process" (1995:xiii)

As Joseph Thomas has argued, much of the literary study of literature for young people emerges from "theory that questions both the idea of literature (with a capital L) and the cultural assumptions that undergird such a category" and from

the “refiguring of the canon such theories allow” (2007: par 3). This work is interested in the different forms that poetry can take when engaged with by young audiences and so it shares this interest in testing distinctions within literary study, particularly those between mainstream adult poetry and that engaged with by adolescents, and between the fields of literature and cultural and media studies.

1.1.1 Adolescence’s in-between-ness

Researchers in developmental psychology (e.g., Erikson 1998) define adolescence as a state of “in-between-ness”. Adolescence is a stage of psychosocial development marked by identity negotiation. Scholars studying vivid adolescent interest with Chicano poetry argue that adolescents live in a “time of tumultuous emotional and physical growth within which is contained the psychosocial nuclei of adult identity” (Mazón: 1984: 113). For young people who negotiate their identities in a global framework marked by intercultural societal reconfigurations, poets linked to postcolonial conditions reproduce “the skills and experience of negotiation and intercultural navigation (...) [that] reflect more closely the social needs of citizens in postmodern contexts” (Obied 2013: 147). Poets who express their identity within contexts marked by cultural imbalance illustrate how “notions of identity are tied to feelings of social justice” (ibid). Mexican poet Octavio Paz, makes an allegorical comparison between adolescents and peoples subject to geopolitical transitions⁹. For Paz, both are equally concerned with the intensification of conflict around issues of identity and by experimentation with new forms and structures in cultural products. Lissa Paul, discussing young people’s interest in the work of some diasporic Anglophone Caribbean poets, argues that young people especially

⁹ “Who are we and how will we realize what we are is the core idea of Octavio Paz in *El Laberinto de la Soledad*. Paz O. (1985) *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. New York: Grove Press

empathise with the experience of being culturally displaced and needing to negotiate an identity.

“To tell you de truth
I don’t know really where I belaang
Yes, divided to de ocean
Divided to de bone”

extract from *Wherever I Hang* by Grace Nichols

A final perspective comes from the idea that adolescence can be characterised by subversion of adult control. Given that adults dominate access to poetry for young people, it is not surprising that educators from different cultural traditions frequently note a resistance to poetry. In his influential text for poetry teacher training, *A l'Ecole de la Poésie* (1980), George Jean insists that poetry teachers consider adolescence as a stage of non-conformity where the established (literary) order is seen as boring and exists to be subverted.

1.1.2. Poetry in print and poetry in oral forms

Print is the dominant form that poetry takes in school, specifically as printed in school textbooks and poetry anthologies. This work will also consider oral ways of disseminating poetry among young people, mainly poetry that is performed. I consider poetry in performance as “a specific manifestation of poetry’s oral mode of realization that is characterised by the direct encounter of the poet with a live audience” (Novak 2011: 12). It can be found in digital recordings. For African and Caribbean traditions, very influenced by African heritages, and Latin-American cultures, poetry is primarily perceived as a popular art that uses oral means of transmission, either by performing or singing poetry or through a combination of both. Exploring poetry created where those traditions and European cultural heritage intersect, involves considering poetry more flexibly and more as a popular form, in the sense of more daily lived, more accessible and

ordinary. Recent academic work (e.g., Novak) from the intersection between comparative literature, ethnomusicology, media and performance studies shows how practising an acoustically attuned sensibility to the written word or applying a literary sensibility to the sonic world may reveal how music, literature and 'acoustic assemblages'¹⁰ are grounded in unbalanced power relations.

Reflecting on the artificiality of the music-poetry divide, British poet and critic James Fenton illustrates, with an interesting example, how poets working in cultures where poetry is a popular art¹¹ are necessarily less arrogant about their work than mainstream Western normalized representations about poetry would have us believe (2002). Fenton observes that poets from these traditions do not take for granted the audience's engagement with their texts and need, in a more down-to-earth approach, to work on the appreciation and attention of their audiences. They mainly work on this with the help of music and performative elements, which have customarily been part of the poet's rendition of the poem in different periods and locations.

The role played in the literary and emotional maturation of young people by different kinds of popular poetry linked to folk and oral traditions, usually disseminated through family and social/cultural informal structures, has been explored by international scholars including experts paying attention to the Spanish and French traditions¹². Nevertheless, little research examines the production and reception of contemporary forms of popular poetry among young people in the present time and the folk and oral traditions that inspire

¹⁰ A term coined by Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier in 2014. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Durham: Duke University Press

¹¹ Fenton contrasts the case of an African poet's performance in an international poetry festival with the poetry renditions of poets supposedly coming from Western standpoints.

¹² Pelegrin's *La Flor de las Maravillas* in Spain and Eluar's *Les Sentiers et les Routes de la Poesie* in France

some poetry at present. Most French and Spanish academic works exploring popular poetry for young audiences have paid attention to the French and Spanish traditional folkloric heritage from a historical and national perspective. Following the activities of various research groups dedicated to exploring young people's engagement with poetry in Spain and reviewing critical literature¹³ shows that the lack of analytical attention to the reception of poetry among the Spanish young public is striking¹⁴.

George Jean, setting the example of young people's vivid engagement with the lyrics of popular music genres such as rock and roll, exhorts educators "to pay attention to poetry outside the school class and support other instances where teenagers find this other language (...) without doubting the necessity to approach the poems within their historical framework and to take into account poetry structures" (1989:113). When this expert talks about "this other language" he is referring to expressions that young people engage with spontaneously, like rock song lyrics but also urchin verse¹⁵. He points out that school provision has held an unchallenged role, which needs to be contested to normalize the 'languages' that young people use outside school. He links this issue (young

¹³ I explored *Cuadernos de Literatura Infantil*, *Peonza* or *Educación y Biblioteca*, *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching and Learning Language and Literature* (Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona) and *Ocnos* (Universidad de Castilla la Mancha).

¹⁴ This was confirmed by one Spanish interviewee who complained about the lack of theoretical works and research that could help those (like her) involved in the promotion of poetry for young people to develop effective arguments to urge the promotion of poetry among Spanish young people. "The neglect of poetry for young people by decision makers is only nurtured by the scarcity of theoretical works exploring different aspects of the evolution of poetry for young people written in Spanish" (Interviewee 3S, see chapters 5 and 6).

¹⁵ Described by Thomas, Styles and Townsend as poetry engaged by young people with no social or literary pretension. It is down to earth, tends to be comical and urban.

people's uses of language and youth culture's frames of reference) with the scarcity of bridges between different learning realms¹⁶.

The need to reduce the distance between home and school as environments for poetry enjoyment has been pointed out by scholars studying children's poetry (e.g., Styles 1998). In the case of older children, the gap that it would be interesting to bridge is between school as a learning setting and the channels of youth culture, which are both popular and contemporary.

1.2 Contextual considerations

Context is always significant in comparative research. With a focus on contextual issues, Crossley and Vulliamy (1997) pay attention to comparative studies that have similarities to this PhD investigation¹⁷, using data that reveal insights into cultural variations and "differences in national educational priorities, in epistemologies, institutional traditions and professional values" (Broadfoot 2000: 362). Experts like Broadfoot, Crossley and Vulliamy warn us that a common problem in comparative studies is how to make comparisons coherent. For this reason some elements of the complexity and structure of the Spanish and French cases are initially taken into consideration. Other complexities will only reveal themselves as the research evolves. As a point of departure, some similarities and differences between two contexts facing cultural changes and educational challenges with regard to postcolonial forces are here accounted for.

¹⁶ "Sin discutir la necesidad de abordar los textos poéticos en su historia, sus estructuras (...) sería necesario, como a veces se hace, sacar la poesía de la clase y crear los lugares, clubes, hogares, talleres, en los que los adolescentes encontraran ese otro lenguaje"

¹⁷ Looking at differences in the education systems of Hungary and Germany

1.2.1 Socio-historical affordances and constraints

France and Spain are two neighbouring countries whose cultural and social lives mutually influence one another and they share many similarities, like being marked by a significant colonial past. France and Spain's colonial legacies differ in many respects but they both share a history of domination, that of Europe over the South. With regard to international immigration, Spain and France have different histories and show different changes in the sizes and compositions of resident populations coming from ex-colonies. However, both countries are, according to the United Nations (2010)¹⁸, among the world's top ten countries in terms of receiving large influxes of immigrants. This is reflected in sociological surveys that put the issue of immigration as one of the main preoccupations for both French and Spanish citizens¹⁹. However, the French and Spanish social processes and socioeconomic situations with regard to the immigration of people from cultures that have suffered colonial rule create different approaches to education in cultural diversity.

A general preoccupation with cultural diversity guides educational agendas in Europe and other Western countries. However, education in cultural diversity can be perceived differently in particular contexts because the issue relates to social processes, which are experienced differently in particular local contexts. Education in cultural diversity is seen as less urgent in Spain, whereas in France it is a critical need because the social integration of cultural minorities has

¹⁸ <https://esa.un.org/migmgprofiles/indicators/files/Spain.pdf>

¹⁹ Attitudes of Spanish citizens towards immigration are increasingly negative. "These perceptions and social constructs have translated into discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, hostility or even violence" (Checa Olmos et al. 2012:134). My translation of "Estas son percepciones y cogniciones sociales que se han traducido, evidentemente, en actitudes y comportamientos discriminatorios, hostilidad e incluso violencia". According to the Spanish Institute of Sociological Research (CIS) immigration has become one of the main concerns of public opinion and is now perceived as a social emergency at the level of drug abuse and criminality. See http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/listaMuestras.jsp?estudio=14249).

created more visible harsh social instabilities. This is the case for urban communities in France, where second and third generations still feel culturally displaced.

A significant difference in the recent histories of both countries that needs to be considered is related to the fact that most of France's colonized territories won their independence in the twentieth century (1946-1962). This provoked, in the process and afterwards, migration from people in the decolonized countries towards the old metropolis. Differently, most countries that were once colonized by Spain were independent by the beginning of the twentieth century. Also, Spain did not receive any immigrant flows for a long period of time since it was completely isolated from the rest of the world for five decades, first due to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship period (1923-1932) and then from the beginning of the Civil War (1936) until the first democratic elections after Franco's dictatorship (1977).

Currently, the largest non-French populations living in France come from French-speaking former colonies. Similarly, in Spain the majority of non-European immigrants are Spanish-speaking people who came from countries which were once part of the Spanish empire. The presence of second- and third-generation European citizens whose families came to live in Europe from Africa and Latin America is not as significant in Spain as it is in France, where immigration from ex-colonies like Morocco, Algeria and other African countries has been happening over a significantly longer period of time.

1.2.2 The different educational systems in France and Spain

Despite the existence of pan-global cultural artefacts in the field of education which "limit the scope of variations within and between communities" (Broadfoot 2000: 367), the French and Spanish education systems differ in several aspects. Their main distinction has to do with different degrees of

centralization. The Spanish educational system is decentralized and, although there are national directives that set down the minimum requirements for the school curriculum, most decisions are taken at a regional level (autonomous communities). On the other hand, France has a centralized system, meaning that decisions concerning how poetry is taught in schools come directly from the Ministry of Education (Ministère d'Éducation Française).

Nationally prescribed examinations take place in the last year of school in both Spain and France (the French *BAC* and the Spanish *Selectividad*). A few poets and/or poems are prescribed by government directives but for the rest certain literary routes are dictated by national or regional educational policies. Within these routes there is considerable scope for publishers, school boards and teachers to put together different projects. The choice of poems in the school curriculum often reflects publishers' preferences because of the relevance of the textbooks and anthologies in literature education in both educational systems. Different French and Spanish organisations have advisory functions and their opinions are also reflected in the poetry disseminated in schools. To a lesser extent, school boards and teachers also play a role in the selection of texts.

1.2.3 French and Spanish education in cultural diversity

The acknowledgement of cultural difference in literature is better understood within a cross-curricular educational framework. Works inspired in different cultural contexts need to be understood in their different historical contexts of production. Varied areas of education intersect in the contextualization of a literary education that accounts for cultural difference, and different aspects intersect in the on-going evolution of the understanding and application of ideas about education in cultural diversity. A global framework of cultural imbalances affects local scenarios in particular ways. However, it is crucial to question to what extent ideas about education in cultural diversity, in each

particular context, might retain the asymmetrical relations of power that notions absorbed in educational politics, such as multiculturalism, claim to question and undermine or erase.

The case of cultural differences between Spanish and Latin America populations differs from the cultural dynamics between French-speaking populations. Multiculturalism in Latin American contexts differs because the groups that demand recognition of their cultural heritage in Latin America are the ones that in fact constructed the nations in which they live. Social and cultural inequalities within Latin-American populations, inherited from colonial systems, have been normalized for a long time, making the cultural imbalances that these create more dispersed, unchallenged and veiled than others (e.g., descendants of African cultures are more united and organized at a global level). Within the global dynamics of migrating populations and Western shifting demographic compositions, these normalized inequalities travel in time and space in ways that remain unquestioned and intersect, for instance when they arrive in Spain, with social discomfort about immigration.

Problems of social cohesion and tensions with different cultural minorities are not (at least not yet) as sharp in Spain as they are in France but social surveys confirm the persistence of, and increases in, stereotypes that diminish the image of people of Latin American descent living in Spain. However, normalized imbalances remain largely unquestioned in Spanish education. Research in History teaching shows that the ways in which schools teach the colonisation and Spanish presence in Latin America differ from one Spanish-speaking country to another. In the Spanish case the emphasis is on the Conquistadores whereas this trend has changed, not so long ago, in school education of countries like Argentina, Venezuela, Peru or Bolivia (Carretero et al 2006).

1.2.4 The domains of poetry for young people in Spain and France

Young people's engagement is structured in this work into three domains in which poetry moves. The distinction is made according to the degree of adult intervention and the type of young people's engagement although the border between these domains is quite blurred²⁰. School education constitutes the first domain that facilitates poetry engagement.

The second, intermediate, domain is the diverse range of people and organisations who play an important role in improving the visibility of poetry for young people. These are cultural mediators and structures like libraries, reading organizations or associations. Thirdly, and acting independently of the other agents, are the varied channels such as online communities or festivals or Slam scenes which allow young people to access poetry in spontaneous ways. Understanding and monitoring the dissemination of poetry in non-school contexts is a more complex issue because, in these cases, poetry is not confined to any institutionalized environment.

French structures and cultural mediators (including some small and alternative publishing houses) engaging with society at local and community levels promote poetry among young people within the public sphere. Cultural interventions and practices undertaken within the second domain have gained in relevance in the past 20 years. Annik Lorant Jolly highlights how "poetry is now being offered, to be read and listened to, much more widely than in the school framework, it is being shared in public and private spaces and the publication of poetry is now very diverse²¹"(2011:70).

²⁰ Although my examination of the Spanish and French fields of poetry for young people revealed that this is more the case in France than in Spain.

²¹ My translation of: "La poésie se donne à lire aujourd'hui bien au -delà du cadre scolaire, elle se partage dans des endroits privés et publics et elle se diversifiée dans ses publications".

The work of many Catholic associations, networks of libraries and, remarkably, the sustained efforts of *Le Printemps des Poètes* have proven essential for supporting the development of many poetry events in French public life but also the existence of many original and diverse poetry projects and the proliferation of small publishing houses editing new poetry for young people. The case of the well-known organisation *Le Printemps des Poètes* is particularly relevant since it has gathered together the efforts of many educational and cultural actors in France. It actively operates at a national level both in and out of schools. The organization has developed as the centre of an influential network of people and organizations engaged in the promotion of poetry. Unfortunately, there is no organization of similar size and scope in Spain. Some important events exist (e.g., Festival de poesia de Granada) and there are organizations in Spain that develop important work in promoting poetry but they are not as numerous as in France and they do not attract citizens' engagement in Spain at the level of *Le Printemps de Poètes* in France. According to Spanish children's poetry specialist Mar Benegas, the field is characterized by a lack of coordinated efforts and an absence of significant structures that carry enough weight to connect these initiatives coherently at a national or even regional level due to lack of support from public educational powers (2013).

The intermediate structures of cultural mediation that help to promote young people's engagement with poetry in diverse forms and venues in the French context are much more significant than in the corresponding domain in Spain. It is important to take into account the fact that France publishes much more poetry for young people than Spain does. However, the huge gap between the French and Spanish poetry fields for young people can be partly attributed to the absence in Spain of significant structures and organizations that coordinate sustained efforts to promote poetry at national level in such a way that their influence could end up permeating, as in the case of France, official poetry

education. Lacking the limits and restrictions imposed by school education, these entities are more dynamic in paying attention to young people's vivid and enthusiastic engagement with different forms of poetry.

Chapter 2. The postcolonial debate

“Whatever our view of what we do, we are made by the forces of people moving around the world.”
(Spivak 2003:3)

2.1. The general postcolonial debate

Inscribing this work in the framework of a postcolonial debate necessarily involves acknowledging the uses, from different academic angles and geographical perspectives, of the adjective ‘postcolonial’. Studies of postcolonialism have attracted growing interest in recent decades. The acknowledgment and diversification of postcolonial theory has transcended the field of literary studies, where it was initially developed. The work of founding theorists like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and especially Homi Bhabha “continues to provide useful theoretical stimulus to the work of later postcolonial theorists” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002:198). However, the spread and diversification of postcolonial criticism has resulted in intricate discussions about the scope of postcolonialism and the suitability of different applications. As a result, what and who can be considered postcolonial²² is not easily defined. Therefore, in order to prove that a postcolonial perspective is still a powerful starting point when analysing literature comparatively, it is important to clarify how a postcolonial lens will help to frame this research. To

²² For an in-depth discussion about definitions of postcolonial “used as a shorthand for the subject positions initiated by colonial encounters” see Shohat E. (1992) Notes on the Post-colonial in Social Text. *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues* 31/32: 99-113

make my position clear, I take my lead from Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's statement, in *The Empire Writes Back*, that "all the culture affected by the process from the moment of colonisation to the present day" (Ashcroft et al 2002: 2) is postcolonial in a broad sense. In a more precise way, when applying the postcolonial adjective to contemporary cultural works, I intend to consider the term as designating "the diverse and often contesting formulations of colonized people" (Ashcroft et al 2002: 199).

When I refer to colonisation I follow Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo in limiting my understanding of colonialism to "the geopolitical and geo-historical constitution of European Western modernity²³" (1995: 2). I agree with numerous scholars that the situation of populations coming "from ex-colonies to what once was the heart of the empire, can be considered post-colonial" (Edwards 2008: 13). This research intends to focus on how the work of poets negotiating cultural identities is currently represented in Europe in this shifting context.

Despite the interest of non-Anglophone scholars in participating in the global postcolonial debate, due to the diversity within colonial and postcolonial heritages and modes of representation many scholars are concerned about the dangers of viewing the colonized world as a tabula rasa on which the principles of Western morality should be written. Scholars interested in the application of postcolonial approaches to the varied legacies of different colonisations highlight the usefulness of a broad understanding of postcolonial approaches that includes the specificities of different regions of the world affected by colonialism at different stages in history. A common socioeconomic and cultural structure of power inherited from colonial domination is the global design that allows analyses of cultural products of varied cultural encounters to

²³ This refers to Hegel's conceptualization of modernity as both an economic and political configuration and an intellectual space. Globalization can also be associated with modernity and "the very constitution and expansion of the Western world system" (Mignolo 1995: 33).

be framed within a postcolonial debate. According to Mignolo, and in line with Shohat's notes on the postcolonial, "postcoloniality is imbibed in each local history and more than an empty signifier is a link between them all (...). It is the connector that can bring the diversity of local histories into a universal project" (Mignolo 2012: 92). This understanding of postcolonial debates is characterized by a common commitment to broadening the base of knowledge production and encouraging engagement across intellectual traditions.

2.2. Different postcolonial strands explore the products of different colonisations

The application of postcolonial approaches has differed from one settler society to another, traditionally privileging what was produced in ex-colonies of the British Empire. French and Spanish academies produced their own autonomous theories for interpreting colonialism "which were not confined within on-going currents of thought elsewhere" (Jauregui et al 2008: 79). However, scholars interested in comparative studies and international dialogues have recognized the exclusion of Francophone, and to an even greater extent Hispanic²⁴, colonial legacies in postcolonial debates at the international level. They have thus started to seek ways of inscribing non-Anglophone colonial legacies into this debate, since according to them these exclusions illustrate a constant need for scholars to fight to overcome academic divisions and linguistic barriers.

²⁴ "The epistemic instruments relevant to the Latin American debate are in some cases rejected or side-lined by other postcolonial traditions" (Sanchez Prado 2011).

Different types of colonisation have produced different politics of cultural assimilation. Even within the same settler societies, colonial rulers developed different colonial strategies in different geographic locations (for example, French colonisation in South Saharan Africa differed from French colonisation in the Caribbean). The consequences of these differences are still palpable in many ways. For instance, in colonies where Europeans settled permanently and created new homelands, impeding access to land for those indigenous peoples who were not exterminated (for example, Australia and America), land claims are still crucial in the artistic discourses articulated by indigenous minorities. The following extract from a poem, by a Chicano poet is a good example of how minorities from Mexican descent living in USA articulate their land claims.

“I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,
leader of men, king of an empire civilized
beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés,
who also is the blood, the image of myself.
I am the Maya prince.
I am Nezahualcóyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas.
I am the sword and flame of Cortes the despot
And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization.
I **owned the land**²⁵ as far as the eye
could see under the Crown of Spain,
and I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood
for the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man and
beast and all that he could trample
But...**THE GROUND WAS MINE.**”

Extract from *I am Joaquín*²⁶ by Rodolfo Corki Gozáles

On the other hand, in colonial systems where indigenous peoples and their often mixed-race descendants were allowed some kind of land possession, colonial domination tended to enact social humiliations over these people. For

²⁵ My emphases on reference to land are highlighted in red. The capital letters are in the original poem.

²⁶ This poem is originally written mixing verses in Spanish and verses in English

example, “Spaniards had conquered people allowing sedentary natives to retain their terrain in exchange for social humiliation” (Bradford 2007:169). For this reason, seeking human respect is central to contemporary indigenous (and *mestizo* or creolized populations) struggles in regions once controlled by Spain and in some regions controlled by France. The following extract from a poem by a Hispanic Caribbean poet talks about the struggles between white colonizers and mulatos:

Salga el mulato ²⁷	Let the mulato go out,
suelte el zapato,	Take out the shoe
díganle al blanco que no se va...	You tell the white man that he is not
	going
Extract from <i>Son Numero 6</i> by Nicolás Guillén	

In these colonial systems, ethnic differentiation was highlighted and naturalized in a way that provided the springboard for social subjugation. However, ethnic differences are more central in French postcolonial approaches than in the Hispanic case. It is a central theme in the Negritude poetry movement as the following verses illustrate:

« Ma Négritude point n'est sommeil de la race mais soleil de l'âme, ma négritude vue et vie Ma Négritude est truelle à la main, est lance au poing »	My Blackness is not the dream of the race but the dream of the soul, my blackness seen and lived. My Blackness is a hand trowel, is a fist lance
--	--

Extract from *Ma Negritude* by Léopold Sédar Senghor

²⁷ From Nicolas Guillen's: Let the mulato go out,/ take out the shoe,/ you tell the white that he is not going.

The degrees to which ethnic differences are still laced with issues that concern social stratification, and the acknowledgment of how these differences have progressed in time and space today, vary not only from one colonial system to another but also within different postcolonial societies. For instance, in Latin America and the Caribbean region, different types of colonialism produced different kinds of unbalanced social relations between creoles, mestizos (mixed-race) and other indigenous groups that are deeply inscribed in current internal social exclusions and have global consequences in today's migrant world. Cultural products like literary works make visible the ways in which different groups of people who have suffered or were born from colonial encounters represent themselves, how they represent their conformity or disagreement with regard to the assimilation of Westernised universal patterns, how they perceive themselves and how they feel themselves to be perceived by peoples in the old settler communities. The following verses from Leo Zelada (Spanish resident born in Peru in 1970) express feelings of displacement that resonate with the mentioned concerns:

« and I don't know now
who I am
if I am an incognito 'anauta²⁸
enunciating some concealed prayer to the sun
or a dark corsair
devastating any unknown port in the south »

Extract from *Machupichu* by Leo Zelada (in Annex 4)

²⁸ Inca wise person

For the international research community, Francophone²⁹ studies is a field of comparative literature, paying attention to cultural products in regions marked by the French language and grouping them by areas where French is spoken. These include Canada, Africa, the Maghreb and the Caribbean/Indian islands. However, “French intellectuals highlight that Francophone studies did not wait for the arrival of postcolonial research to be concerned about some aspects (...), a great number of which meet the preoccupations of postcolonial scholars”³⁰ (Moura 2001: 165). Importantly, the intellectual contributions of some Francophone intellectuals, such as Martinican Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* and Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* or Tunisian Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer And The Colonized*, served as foundations for the development of postcolonial studies³¹. These essays expressed the views of people who suffered the cultural domination of French colonial rule but their relevance transcended the Francophone world. Despite the fact that influential French personalities such as Jean Paul Sartre played an important role in introducing the ideas and cultural claims of the abovementioned Francophone Caribbean and African thinkers to the French intelligentsia³², the Anglophone bias in the development of postcolonial studies has veiled the relevance of these foundational texts for Francophone criticism.

²⁹ Francophone itself is a term that “can be understood in a double sense: as the francophone representation of globalization and as the more or less linguistic and cultural limits of this globalization²⁹” (Bessière 2001:171).

³⁰ My translation of “Les études francophones n’ont pas attendu l’avènement de recherches postcoloniales pour se préoccuper des certains aspects et que nombre de leurs analyses rencontrent les préoccupations des chercheurs postcoloniaux»

³¹ Also certain works with global influence have explained cases of the French colonial past from a regional point of view. For instance, in the case of Africa, the contribution of Yves Valentine Mudumbe highlighted the distinctive standpoints of Africa with regard to French colonial rule. Mudumbe’s *The Invention of Africa* is considered equivalent to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in terms of a postcolonial understanding of Africa’s colonial legacy.

³² Sartre prefaced *The Wretched of the Earth* and Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, and wrote “*Orphée Noir*”, the preface to Senghor’s *African Poetry Anthology*.

Recent years have witnessed the spread of multiple scholarly efforts devoted to bridging Francophone studies and postcolonial criticism, to the point that some scholars are arguing that “French theory has returned to France after a long exile in the United States (...) rejuvenated and shaken up, especially by postcolonial studies” (Birnbaum 2006). Seemingly, “the social unrest among immigrant communities in France in 2005 helped to hasten the change in attitude towards postcolonial studies in this country” (Hale 2007: 330).

However, “French critics have tended to reject the notion that postcolonial theory could help them understand the diversity represented by the world of *Francophonie*” (Hale 2007: 329). Also, the term *Francophonie* itself³³ is deeply rooted in colonial history, and concern about the cultural imbalances that this term tends to enact for many French-speaking intellectuals was made explicit in an emblematic manifesto published in *Le Monde* in 2007 (44 signatories). In urging change, these writers (most of them novelists but some poets among them) claimed that the first step should be the elimination of the very category of Francophone writers. They assert: “it is time for the French to stop looking down on francophone³⁴ authors, as foreigners writing in French are known, because these very novelists — many from former French colonies — hold the key to energizing French literature.” (Riding 2007). For these intellectuals the literary isolation of Francophone writers reinforces “the prevailing view here that colourful francophone writing set in exotic climes is somehow inferior to more intellectual home-grown fiction” (ibid). These issues permeate the field of education.

³³ “Francophonie negotiates the planetary extension of a field whose critical paradigms originally sprang from predominantly European languages and literatures.” (Apter 2005:297,298). Francophone has become a politically charged concept because many foreign-born French writers do not feel loved in France today, as the mentioned article in *Le Monde* explains well

³⁴ Riding does not capitalize the use of this adjective

Some postcolonial debate also exists around the issue of the terms in which the product of Spanish colonisation in the Americas can be discussed within postcolonial debates. The usefulness of also considering the heterogeneous product of Spanish colonisation as postcolonial is that it can be framed within comparative studies that discuss the implications of local peculiarities within a global design marked by cultural imbalances. Current scholarship on colonial Latin America, the oldest colonial system in the world, also suggests ways “to broaden an approach to postcolonial studies so as to include this region-specific perspective” (Mazzotti 1998: 77). The ideas of the nineteenth-century Cuban poet and philosopher José Martí about the intellectual independence of the Spanish Americas have played a foundational role in the development of later critical work. Martí’s influential essay *Nuestra America* (1891) was a call for the resumption of a Pan-American distinctive identity as a form of resistance against Western domination and neo-imperialism. Martí’s constant exhortations to generate critical Latin American thought that reflected the essence of a distinctly mestizo Latin American idiosyncrasy (he made famous the epithet “America mestiza”/ Mixed-race America) are still a reference for scholars and thinkers interested in cultural manifestations that reflect the past and current relationships between Western influences and Latin American idiosyncrasies. Importantly, Martí insisted on the need to develop people’s identification with Spanish American cultures from the field of education: “it is crucial to teach with enough depth and detail the history of America, from the Incas to the present moment even if we don’t teach about Greece. We need our own Greece more, we have to prioritize teaching about our own Greece before teaching a Greece that is not ours” (1891:135).³⁵

³⁵ My translation of “La historia de América, de los incas a acá, ha de enseñarse al dedillo, aunque no se enseñe la de los arcontes de Grecia. Nuestra Grecia es preferible a la Grecia que no es nuestra. Nos es más necesaria”

The movement referred to as the philosophy of liberation developed in Latin America at the end of last century. It constitutes an important line of ideas that encompasses a critique of Eurocentric discourse in universal history and proposes alternative ways to read it. The Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, one of the founders of this movement, is the author of the work *The Invention of the Americas* (1995). This title interestingly mirrors the name of the influential essay *The Invention of Africa* (1988) by Congolese philosopher and poet Valentin-Yves Mudimbe. This choice of title helps us to elucidate the intention of some Latin American scholars to situate their claims against Western cultural domination within a more global postcolonial debate. The Latin American ideological trends referred to above can be seen to pertain to the realm of the postcolonial debate, since they converge on the need for “a very specific form of decolonisation and liberation: the non-coloniality of power” (Quijano 2005).

Both French and Spanish scholars signal their intention to avoid the oppositional readings which have traditionally been the focus in Anglophone postcolonial debates. Describing postcolonial realities in terms of bi-polar divisions (colonizers-colonized) risks ignoring the fact that, in contemporary societies, in-between positions are the living reality of large and varied populations that now reside in what was once the imperial side of the divide. French and Spanish criticism is mostly interested in highlighting the usefulness of postcolonial readings that are not necessarily focused on resistance against Western cultural domination and insists on exploring primarily the intersection of different facets of power and tensions that are often related to the aftermaths of the Spanish and French empires.

A significant body of the literary work that currently occupies postcolonial discussions, and that can be given the label culturally hybrid, has to do with creations from what Marie Louise Pratt has called “contact zones”. The term

hybridity can be used in postcolonial debates to describe what emerges as a consequence of interaction between peoples in colonial and postcolonial “contact zones”. Recent postcolonial scholarship pays attention to Europe as a contact zone (e.g., Boehmer, Mignolo). Marie Louise Pratt defines such zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991:34). However, Francophone and Hispanic explorations of cultural products that can now be grouped into a more global postcolonial debate have not generally concentrated, like most postcolonial criticism, on the view from the Old Centre, and therefore have not studied culturally hybrid products in Europe. This trend seems to be changing in Francophone scholarship since France now sees more acutely the need to explore, from a postcolonial perspective, the relationship between current social problems and the cultural identities of those members of the French population who come from non-European territories that were once (and some that still are) under French rule.

2.3. Multiculturalism, education in cultural diversity and the postcolonial debate

“Postcolonial poets, even when staying at home, have long inhabited cultural spaces that are thoroughly multilingual and multicultural long before many First World poets circumnavigated the world in search of fresh encounters” (Ramazani 2001: 7)

Globalization has homogenized educational agendas in many ways. Education in cultural diversity has become a common global theme in Western educational agendas. In the spread of multiculturalism what Stanley Fish has called “boutique multiculturalism” (1997) seems to have taken precedence over a more engaged understanding of education in cultural diversity that takes into

account different social, cultural and historical issues. In literature for young people the idea of multiculturalism, with the aim of offering young readers texts that will help them gain an education in cultural diversity, has been globally accepted and translated in Western countries' educational policies since the 1980s. However, multiculturalism is understood differently in diverse local scenarios, and multicultural agendas develop differently in different contexts. This makes it difficult to talk about multiculturalism in international comparative studies, since different ideological perspectives on cultural differences are linked to cultural and sociological issues that change rapidly and affect local contexts in particular ways. In this vein Spanish scholar Miguel Rodrigo signals the fact that "the cultural pluralism of modern societies makes it difficult to establish what the borders are and the criteria for cultural differentiation"³⁶(1999:69).

Framed in terms of postcolonial criticism, the notion of cultural hybridity developed by Homi Bhabha "posits a viable alternative to the exoticism of multiculturalism" (1994:38) because it highlights the imbalances in cultural differences. It intends to open the way toward "conceptualizing a [genuinely] international culture" (ibid). In his seminal work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha defends the concept of "a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (1994:5). However, even the concept of hybridity can be problematic if it is not well-framed and explained in contexts of cultural diversity marked by cultural imbalances. For this reason, postcolonial critics such as Gayatri C. Spivak (1999) warn against those that are given to utopian visions³⁷ of global transcultural communities despite the obvious fact that enduring racial prejudices, cultural biases and social

³⁶ My translation of "Las sociedades modernas se caracterizan por un pluralismo cultural que hace difícil establecer cuales son las fronteras y cuales son los criterios de diferenciación cultural" (Rodrigo 1999 :69)

³⁷ She calls it 'hybridist triumphalism'

hierarchies, all of which persist throughout much of the contemporary world, have yet to be overcome. In this line, Martinican poets Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau propose, rather than taking a celebratory but empty approach to cultural diversity, “embracing today’s diversification of cultural realities taking into account its fruitfully contradictory nature (...) listening to the echoes of the abyss and the rumour of all the world”³⁸ (2007: 38).

Some extracts of Nicolas Guillén’s *Son number six* help to illustrate a way to explore the contradictory nature of Cuban cultural hybridity. The poem expresses how “everything is mixed, the black and the white” (negros y blancos, todo mezclado) but there are “ones who lead and others who are led” (uno mandando y el otro mandado”).

Yoruba soy,³⁹
cantando voy,
llorando estoy,
y cuando no soy yoruba,
soy [congo, mandinga, carabalí](#).
Atiendan, amigos, mi son, que empieza así:

Adivinanza⁴⁰
de la esperanza:
lo mío es tuyo,
lo tuyo es mío;
toda la sangre
formando un río.
(..)

³⁸ My adapted translation from this quote “Rejoindre son étonnante diversité, non plus pour en réaliser l’unité monolithique, mais pour en vivre librement les différences foisonnantes, fécondèrent contradictoires, dans les longs échos du gouffre et la rumeur du Tout-monde”.

³⁹ I am Yoruba,/I go singing,/I am crying,/and when I am not Yoruba,/ I am congo, mandinga, carabalí./ Pay attention my friends, my ‘son’ starts like this

⁴⁰ Riddle/ of the hope:/what is mine is yours,/what is yours is mine/all the blood/ forming a river

Estamos juntos desde muy lejos,⁴¹

jóvenes, viejos,

negros y blancos, todo mezclado;

uno mandando y otro mandado,

todo mezclado;

[San Berenito](#) y otro mandado

todo mezclado;

negros y blancos desde muy lejos,

todo mezclado;

Santa María y uno mandado,

todo mezclado;

todo mezclado, Santa María,

San Berenito, todo mezclado,

todo mezclado, San Berenito,

San Berenito, Santa María,

Santa María, San Berenito,

¡todo mezclado!

(...)

De aquí no hay nadie que se separe;⁴²

mire y no pare,

oiga y no pare,

beba y no pare,

coma y no pare,

viva y no pare,

¡que el son de todos no va a parar!

Extract from *Son Numero 6* by Nicolás Guillén

⁴¹ We have been united for a long time, / young and old,/blacks and whites, all mixed up,/ one telling what to do and the other being told,/ all mixed up;/ San Berenito and another one being told what to do,/ all mixed up;/blacks and whites for a long time,/ all mixed up;/ Santa Maria and another being told;/all mixed up etc.

⁴² No one in here will be separated;/look and don't stop./listen and don't stop./drink and don't stop, the "son" for everybody will not stop

These verses resonate with the expression of other more contemporaneous Spanish and French (also English) speaking poets linked to postcolonial histories, as will be seen in more detail in the next chapter.

“It is not a legend of Grand Corps Malade⁴³, look at us!,

We have crossed, swimming rivers and mud

We have slept in the snow with an empty stomach and we are still standing”

Extract from *Les Poètes se Cachent pour Ecrire*⁴⁴ by Soleyman Diamanka

2.4. Literature for young people and the postcolonial debate

Postcolonial approaches to literature for young people pay attention to tensions and cultural imbalances inherited from colonialism, between colliding cultures in which one has superiority or power over the other. These approaches take into account the ways in which texts for young people negotiate and represent tensions motivated by experiences of cultural displacement that superficial multicultural agendas ignore or overlook. Claire Bradford claims that postcolonial theory in the field of literature for young people has not been used as a “systematic application of key ideas and analytical strategies” (2007: 7). In her study *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings on Children’s Literature*, Bradford adopts an interesting and systematic postcolonial approach to the examination of texts for young readers. Bradford focuses rather exclusively on the “continuing influence of colonialism upon the lives of indigenous peoples” (2011: 180) in societies like Canada or Australia. Although she does not concentrate on cultural hybridization in Western societies as a result of on-going

⁴³ Grand Corps Malade is probably the best-known poet-slamer in France.

⁴⁴ This poem is originally written in French as seen in Appendix 4

human movements, her work offers interesting insights through attempts, like this one, “to consider texts in relation to the politics of production and reception that inform them” (2007:5). In a similar way, Grahame Harper's article, *As if by Magic: World Creation in Postcolonial Children's Literature*, examines the complexity of social constructions in some English postcolonial novels and picturebooks for young readers. His work uses a methodological approach that can also be illuminating when analysing other corpuses of literature for young people because he provides in-depth analyses of important issues such as linguistic complexities, dialogue between communities that come and go, mutual recognition of cultural dislocation and the on-going asymmetries of global power. It also includes the acknowledgment that “cultural hybridization⁴⁵ does not lead to inauthenticity” (1997: 47). This involves recognizing the contributions of new citizens whose cultural traditions differ from existing dominant conventions.

Curiously, in non-English speaking European countries, postcolonial studies associated with literature for young people have attracted most attention in the Nordic countries, where criticism focuses mainly on Nordic colonialism (e.g. the Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies of Linnaeus University). In contrast, there exists little criticism examining corpuses of French and Spanish children's books from a postcolonial perspective. This is particularly significant when we consider that imperialism was, for long periods of time, a crucial part of cultural representations in France, Belgium and Spain.

Even in the more-developed academic field of Anglophone literature for young people, numerous scholars call attention to the fact that “awareness of

⁴⁵ In the conclusion to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha highlighted the transformative potential of cultural hybridity: “we must not merely change the narratives of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces” (1994: 367).

colonialism is rare in children's literature criticism" (Hunt and Sands 2000: 49), and that "interrogations of postcolonial theory itself as it applies to readings of children's literature are almost absent from critical discourses" (Bradford 2007:8). This fact is even more significant in the study of literature for young people written in French and Spanish. In France, an emerging academic interest in the field of children's literature (Leveque 2012)⁴⁶ concentrates on examinations of the past rather than on the present, on colonial texts rather than on the close relationship between postcolonialism and neo-colonialism in contemporary works for young readers. In Spain, the small amount of criticism that has adopted a postcolonial perspective on the examination of children's literature has focused on classic works of English children's literature. We should bear in mind the weight of the English-speaking publishing industry in contexts like the Spanish one, where more than 50 per cent of the children's books published in Spain are not written by Spanish-speaking authors. Until quite recently, literature for young people written about Spanish realities and their relationships to a colonial past, its aftermaths and even neo-colonial situations, attracted no research interest. There is a growing interest in exploring Spanish works from a postcolonial perspective amongst young scholars now entering the field⁴⁷.

British scholar Peter Hunt also highlights the postcolonial potential for "creating a new criticism in children's literature" (2003:25), arguing that we can apply a postcolonial perspective to any analysis of children's literature that takes into account the unbalanced relationship between the adult writer and child reader. Hunt, along with Karen Sands, has also pointed out that the application of "postcolonial theory to children's literature in English is observed from the perspectives of the former colonials or postcolonials rather than of their imperial

⁴⁶ Leveque M. (2012) Un Simple Mot Troublant et Magique. *Strenae* 3. [http:// www.strenae.revues.org](http://www.strenae.revues.org). Accessed May 2013

⁴⁷ E.g. Facultad de Educación in Universidad de Valencia or Facultad de Filosofía y Letras in Universidad de Chile

rulers” (2000:49). My contention about the French and Spanish fields of literature for young people coincides with their opinion about the English case: “if literature for young people is to maintain its claim to be culturally influential” (ibid) an awareness of the postcolonial debate at the (old) Centre (e.g. UK, Spain, France) is vital.

The power relationship between adults and young people in texts for young readers adds an interesting dimension to postcolonialism that I try to take into account to some extent in this research as explained in the previous chapter. However, the postcolonial point of view that I follow focuses chiefly on postcolonialism as an on-going decolonizing enterprise because this can be opened up for critical reflection in texts for young readers that deal with issues of resistance, power, ethnicity, identity, language, cultural and social constructions from different perspectives.

The postcolonial debate about children’s literature has rather exclusively focused on fiction. However this situation could be contested given the relevance of poetry within literature and within the global education of individuals. Postcolonial approaches to mainstream poetry are scarce and the few existing book-length studies about the particular literary qualities of poetry that can be explored from a postcolonial perspective do not focus on poetry for young people. However, “postcolonial studies and poetics offer a potentially valuable blend of strategies for exploring (an) important and varied body of work” (Ramazani 2001: 4). A postcolonial approach to poetry for young people works with the disruption of many conventions prevailing in mainstream school approaches and dominant poetry culture. It is interested in how poetry deploys different aesthetic or discursive elements as a means of challenging the dominance of Western linguistic and aesthetic patterns, models, ideas and ways of understanding the world. As postcolonial critic Jahan Ramazani points out, a

postcolonial lens emphasizes how the poem “seeks to disentangle itself from disciplinary norms conducive to perpetuating cultural domination” (2001: 165).

Chapter 3. A literary exploration of French and Spanish poems currently available for young people

“Intercultural dynamics - whether experienced as a condition of tragic mixture and alienation or as the comic integration of multiple strategies and sources – have fuelled some of the most powerful poetry of our time”
(Ramazani 2001: 7)

The split and mixed cultural experiences of a growing proportion of Western populations from intermingled cultural heritages frame the lives of French and Spanish contemporary young people. The contacts, conflicts and convergences between different peoples and cultures leave their mark in the form of literary texts. Postcolonial approaches to poetry stress the way in which these works respond in both their content and their form to the unsettling milieus in which they are composed and in which we encounter them.

The literary analysis of a small set of poems that follows, pays attention to how poetry, “a genre rich in paradox and multivalent symbols, irony and metaphor - is well suited to mediating and registering the contradictions of split cultural experience” (Ramazani 2001: 6). The objective of an exploratory analysis of poems is to foreground the relevance for young audiences of a postcolonial reading of and listening to poetry. Considering that this study is positioned at the interface between the poems’ intrinsic qualities and young audiences’ interests and frames of reference, I try to stress important issues that a

postcolonial approach to poetry foregrounds for adolescents. I follow Ramazani's belief that "postcolonial poetry demands specific literary modes of response and recognition" (2001: 4). Consequently, paying attention to issues that poetry linked to postcolonial heritages foregrounds for adolescents will lead to reflection on pertinent strategies for supporting young people with difficulties they may have in grasping these issues. I will specifically highlight how the contextualization of poetry could help young people link the conditions of production of the poems and their contexts of reception and cultural references.

To interrogate how the claim to cultural heterogeneity can be analysed in literary terms I will be guided by theoretical efforts dedicated to exploring distinctive features and "specific aesthetic strategies and idioms through which writers creatively articulate their postcoloniality" (Ramazani 2001:184). With regard to the examination of different stylistic devices I will pay special attention to metaphors. French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's ⁴⁸ important contribution highlighting the creative function of metaphor in changing our perceptions of the world is enhanced by postcolonial studies of poetry. Postcolonial criticism highlights how metaphors create in poetry, "a third space of cultural convergence" (Ramazani 2001: 180).

⁴⁸ In 1975 French philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote *The Rules of Metaphor* focused on the creation and recreation of meaning through metaphor.

3.1. My specific literary exploration

Within the debates⁴⁹ and contexts referred to in the previous chapters, the focus of this section is on how poems written in French and Spanish, currently available for young audiences living in Spain and France, that I could find while surveying school textbooks, anthologies and online channels, deploy different literary elements and strategies. A special focus on authorship led me to filtering French and Spanish poems that were written by poets whose cultural backgrounds were rooted in the colonized territories of the French and Spanish colonial pasts. I aimed to explore connections with different regions of the world that experienced Spanish or French imperial rule but I selected poems considering a balanced geographical distribution, including Spanish and French poems inspired by the different cultural heritages of poets with Caribbean (French and Spanish), African (French) and Andean roots (Spanish). Consequently, the poets' cultural origins determined the selection of poems that I analysed.

In the case of the poems found in print form in school textbooks and anthologies, I selected for the Spanish case a Spanish-speaking poet representing Andean heritage (Gabriela Mistral) and a poet representing Caribbean heritage (Nicolás Guillén). For the French case I selected a French-speaking poet representing African heritage (Leopold Senghor) and a poet representing Franco-Caribbean heritage (Aimé Césaire). Césaire, Guillén, Mistral and Senghor are the authors of poems found in both school textbooks

⁴⁹ As was referred to before, the postcolonial can be better referred to as a "debate" that encompasses varied trends discussing experiences associated with the negotiation of cultural imbalances. For instance, "many literary critics now prefer anti-colonialism to post-independence or post-colonisation as the defining criterion for postcolonialism" (Ramazani 2001: 23)

and the recommendations of national bodies. Therefore this is officially sanctioned poetry.

In the Spanish case, I gave priority to poets like Mistral and Guillén (rather than poets like Neruda and Dario both figured in the samples of textbooks and anthologies) because the articulation of Mistral and Guillén's postcolonial position is a distinctive feature of their work. Spanish speaking poets like Mistral and Guillén, retained in my sample like Jose Martí or Luis Pales Matos who I also mention in this work, are examples of poets who have intentionally detached themselves from Eurocentric conceptions of poetry.

In the case of poems that I selected for analysis during my search of non-school poetry, I selected the work of poets with the help of poetry organizations. These were poets who participate in poetry events with a similar desire to claim and highlight the cultural richness of their indigenous roots in contrast to a dominating Eurocentric cultural context. The suggestions made by poetry organizers facilitated my selection of a small number of poets and performances that I could see, read and/or listen to. The final filtering was done among the smaller corpus of digital recordings of poetry performances that I watched and listened to, prioritizing performances from poets who appeared to be more active with young people. To further narrow my selection I prioritized poems as their authors performed them and those where the aural possibilities of the poem's language seemed to me particularly salient. This was particularly interesting for the kind of postcolonial analysis that I wanted to illustrate.

Rouge by Julian Delmaire (French citizen from Senegalese and Caribbean descent)

Iniciación by Lilian Pallares (Colombian Spanish resident)

Les Poètes se Cachent Pour Ecrire by Soleiman Diamanka (Mali-French)⁵⁰

Machupichu by Leo Zabala (Peru, Spanish resident)⁵¹

As in the case of the printed poems that I selected, these poems are also inspired by or originated in different geographic locations that can highlight the variations and pluralities of existing colonial legacies. I try to disentangle the peculiarities of different local or regional nuances when contextualizing each particular poem.

3.1.1 Introducing the poets

I acknowledge “that readings have status not objectively but relative to their circumstances” (Stockwell 2002:4). This is with regard to both the context of the texts’ production, explored here, and the context of their reception, an issue in considering the relationship of the poems’ content and form to young peoples’ frames of reference. Paying attention to the context of poetry production means also considering the historical and sociological contextualization of the poem’s rhetorical strategies and the meaning that the poets deploy. This way of framing the discussion of poetry has relevant implications for how poems may be taught, or perhaps encountered, in a context of reception that is likely to yield maximum potential for a postcolonial understanding and response to be realised.

The focus is on the different strategies deployed by poets that could allow young people to empathize with the postcolonial energies that the poems enact. As Silliman puts it: “the primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though it might be, but in the attitude towards

⁵⁰ In Appendix 4

⁵¹ In Appendix 4

reception that it demands of the reader” (Silliman in Golding 2009: 170). This is because, as Charles Bernstein explains, poetry (and the sound of poetry, which is his focus) “can never be completely recuperated as ideas, as content, as narrative, as extra lexical meaning” (1999:299).

In poetry, the voice of the author has a distinctive personal connection with the production contexts of the poet and the text’s intentionality. This is not necessarily shared to the same extent with other kinds of literary texts because “poetry is the literary genre where subjectivity is maximal” (Dessons 1995: 81). Consequently, given the selected poet’s personal ties to colonized territories that were taken into account as criteria of selection, an introduction to the authors precedes an exploratory analysis that foregrounds a postcolonial reading. In the case of authorial performances of poems figuring in the sample, the presence of the poet’s persona constitutes an additional feature for the contextualization of poems. The poets featured in the sample share the desire to claim and highlight the cultural richness of their indigenous roots (African, Caribbean, Andean), setting them in contrast to a dominating Eurocentric cultural context. In their own ways, and with the particularities of their own individual backgrounds, their personal ties to colonized cultures influence the formal strategies of their writings at different levels.

3.1.2 The printed poets

In the case of the less contemporary authors represented in the sample, it is important to consider that Mistral, Guillén, Senghor and Césaire are regarded as canonical writers in a broad sense (Nobel Prize winner, national poet of Cuba, member of the French Academy, touchstone of black writing) and were also influential intellectuals of the twentieth century. However, it is not prudent to place all the weight of these poets’ influence on their writing since their

active social, cultural and political commitments were also very important in disseminating their work.

Beside their literary efforts, these poets were actively engaged, from a political and cultural point of view, in the claims of their Andean, Caribbean and African heritages and ways of understanding the world. The commitment of these authors to the revaluation of their roots within the Spanish and French dominating cultures was deep and complex, and their relevance and significance within colonial and postcolonial debates go further than I can illustrate here. Nevertheless, it is important to point out some connections and facts that are related to how these poets articulated their commitment to cultural decolonisation in their writings.

In the cases of Sédar Senghor (Senegal 1906-France 2001)⁵² and Aimé Césaire (Martinique 1913-2008), who lived in metropolitan France for long periods of time and attended the prestigious French *Ecole Normale*, their political and cultural activism led to them founding the *Négritude* cultural movement, together with other black intellectuals. Their interest in the politics of culture focused on the need for alternatives to the dominance of French culture in the territories colonized by French rule. They ensured that cultural alternatives were emphasized and that distinctive African perspectives and aesthetics were valorized. *Négritude* sought to affirm black identity and to celebrate black African values as a reaction to a dominant Western view of African culture as undeveloped, primitive and poor.

In the aesthetics of postcolonial writing, Nicolas Guillén (Cuba 1902-1989) wrote from the perspective of a “mestizo America”, José Martí’s famous epithet defending a Latin American cultural identity as distinctively hybrid. When talking about *mestizaje* it is important to observe that the expressions of

⁵² birth and death dates and places

Guillén's hybridism are inspired by both his African and Spanish roots as well as by Caribbean creole culture. This has been called the characteristic *mulatto-ness* of Antillean poetry. Guillén entertained connections with the Negritude movement after a decisive encounter with Langston Hughes but his poetry is distinctively Cuban-Antillean.

Mistral (Chile 1889-USA 1957) stands apart from an indigenous identity related to black African roots since her indigenous bonds have to do with an Amerindian framework. She is called "india de vasco/ Vasc indian" or "Andean Gabriela"⁵³. Mistral's political activism is also different. Instead of the national focus of Guillén, Césaire and Senghor Mistral's devotion to the politics of culture operates at a Pan-American level. She pioneered a Pan-American identity that foregrounded Latin America's indigenous cultural values and imagery in broad terms.

Guillén was an important member of the Cuban communist party, Césaire was the municipal major of Fort de France and Senghor was Senegal's president. Mistral, in her turn, represented Latin America at the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, where she worked on defending women's rights and promoting education.

These four poets were all involved in education and interested in childhood despite approaching them from different angles. They were teachers and/or writers who addressed young people expressly and extensively in their poems. However, Gabriela Mistral's work as educationalist is the most noteworthy of all, as can be appreciated in her rich production of essays on educational topics.

The Negritude poets, Senghor and Césaire, together with Mistral and Guillén, all emphasize the importance of dialogue and exchange among different

⁵³ Gabriela Mistral introduced herself as "india de vasco" in her presentation as consul in Madrid in 1932.

cultures. However, the defence of the black man's values sought by Negritude, Guillén's mulatto-ness and Mistral's Amerindian roots are celebrated and shown with pride in their poetry.

Gabriela Mistral wrote expressly for young people and she is popularly known for her children's poetry. She wrote many more specifically children's poems than Césaire, Guillén and Senghor did. It is important to note here Mistral's conviction "that the only valid children's poetry was popular poetry and particularly poetry from the folkloric traditions that each people has most easily at hand"⁵⁴. However, we need to consider that the expression of the distinctiveness of Mistral's Andean roots or her claims for a Pan-American identity is subtle and not always identifiable in her poetry that is especially anthologized for children.

The four selected poems that I selected from printed school materials can be organized into two blocks according to their discourses. The two Caribbean poems, which are probably more accessible to a younger public, deal with inter-racial coexistence. The other two poems, Senghor's and Mistral's, focus on the issue of living in a liminal space. These last two are more mysterious and elliptical in their symbolic texture so aesthetic training could be critical to enhancing a reader's appreciation of them. Although all of the poems provide a central symbolic image that includes a dimension of conflict (forest/wall/garden/stranger), the poems of Césaire and Guillén attempt to control this conflict through exhortation to an ideal. In terms of formal strategies the conflict in *La Extranjera* and *Jardin de France* is framed in ways that do not permit it to be easily assimilated or erased through absorption into universals.

⁵⁴ My translation of "la poesía infantil válida, o la única válida, era la popular y propiamente el folklore que cada pueblo tiene a mano" (Montoya 2003:104)

Race is a central issue in Nicolas Guillén's poem *La Muralla* and Césaire Aimé's *Demain*. They can both be seen as odes to harmonious living between people of different ethnic origins. Leopold Sédar Senghor also deals with race in the poem *Jardin de France* but with black and white ethnic differences metonymically symbolizing African and European ways of living. The core concern in this poem is not an ethnic issue but an expression of vivid longing for the author's intimate African roots and his distant cultural references. Similarly, Mistral deals with cultural displacement in *La extranjera* in deeply feminine style (erotic, we might say, in Audre Lorde's sense⁵⁵).

Exile is dealt with in a broader sense in Mistral's *La Extranjera* than in Senghor's *Jardin de France*. Senghor seems to be more capable than Mistral of negotiating his identity after displacement despite his ambiguous feelings towards the French metropolis. Unlike Mistral, Senghor can identify concrete roots that he is able to make his own (the African). Mistral's poem foregrounds the impossibility of belonging.

Some scholarly efforts have focused on postcolonial strategies enacted in the work of the abovementioned poets, although not for educational purposes or with young people's interests in mind. These lines, coming from the *Historical Companion of Postcolonial Literatures, Continental Europe and Its Empires*, illustrate how, for instance, a Guillén poem is set as an example of postcolonial writing: "For those who might doubt that poetry - that is poetry in general - is a fertile ground for Latin American critical thought, this poem [Nicolas Guillén's *Guadalupe W.I.*] reveals the extent to which many poems continue contributing to the struggle for decolonisation" (Poddar, Patke, Jensen 2008: 563). However, an exhaustive selection of critical literature that adopts a postcolonial

⁵⁵ "The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling (...) a power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change" (1984:54)

perspective on the analysis of Senghor, Mistral, Césaire and Guillén’s poetry is unmanageable here. This is partly due to the existing volume and diversity of critical literature in English, French and Spanish dedicated to these poets. It is also due to the fact that French and Spanish scholars have not, until very recently, ‘labelled’ critical efforts related to literary works that pay attention to unbalanced power relations around French and Spanish colonial and neo-colonial heritages as pertaining to a postcolonial debate.

3.1.3 The performing poets

“Rime’s reason – the truth of sound – is that meaning is rooted in the a-rationality of sound, as well as in the body’s multiple capacities for signification”.
(Bernstein 1998:21)



Julian Delmaire



Lilian Pallares



Soleiman Diamanka



Leo Zelada

Illustration 2

Here I introduce the poets Julian Delmaire (1976, French-born of Senegalese descent) and Lilian Pallares (1975, Colombian-born, Spanish citizen) within the frame of their literary accomplishments and their engagement in the French and Spanish cultural and educational environments. An individual presentation of Soleiman Diamanka and Leo Zelada and a brief commentary about their poems *Machupichu* and *Les poètes de cachent pour écrire* can be found in Appendix 4.⁵⁶

Pallares and Delmaire have in common a dynamic involvement in varied artistic projects. They both participate actively in events and develop artistic activities that combine poetry with other cultural and art expressions. These range from the creation of video-poems, and in poetry performances that involve dance and music, to collaborations with hip hop or rap singers for different purposes and events. The cultural activism of these poets in their local communities is also similar. An example is their comparable commitment to the promotion of poetry as a type of lively literary creation (palpitating and undulating words, as these poets put it) that is in permanent dialogue with other art forms of the spontaneous and popular contemporary kind, in tune with young people's preferences. Young people can identify with these poet's performances because of the author's presence and modes of recitation, in which they are aesthetically closer to the cultural syncretism of much contemporary young culture than to conventional literary modes and formal educational establishments.

The poets in this latter sample organize and participate in actions that seek to promote young people's enjoyment of poetry. Pallares and Delmaire visit schools and participate in cultural interventions for young audiences in

⁵⁶ The reduced size of this sample takes into consideration the fact that poems are translated into English from French or Spanish, and that the performed poems are commonly long poems needing to be transcribed, analysed and contextualized. In appendix 4 the other two selected performed poems can be found as examples of the poetry, in different forms, that I encountered in the exploration of the French and Spanish fields of available poetry for young people and which could also be analysed applying the same postcolonial lenses.

different environments but Julian Delmaire's commitment to education is the most salient of all. Delmaire recognizes that he feeds artistically on his interaction with young people. Pallares, in her turn, is interested in fostering the continuity between childhood and youth enjoyment of poetry. She makes performances specifically addressed to children (e.g., *Tan Tan poetico*) but also addresses young people in other readings and is interested in observing differences in engagement.

The poetry of these authors usually alludes to their non-European cultural heritages through images rooted in the land and natural elements but their cultural activism can be framed in Western urban contexts. Pallares, for instance, asserted in an interview during a local TV program that the streets of the neighbourhood where she lives (in Madrid) represent for her an "urban literary laboratory" (Pallares 2008). These poets share an especial interest in aspects of contemporary urban lives in European cities that connect with their own condition as first (Lilian Pallares, Soleiman) or second generation immigrants (Julian Delmaire). Lilian Pallares also said that she connects with stories of inbetweenness because she lives the narratives of recent Latin American immigrants in Spain "in first person"(2008). When I talked to her when I visited Madrid's book fair (2015) she declared herself to be a very Caribbean woman but asserted at the same time: "(I am) from no country". These poets manifest their subject position between two cultures in their poetry but they also show a general interest in the cultural negotiations and positions of inbetweenness generated by global people displacements. This common concern frames the relevance of their poetry not only within their own local dimensions but also within a global design. An example of how these poets are also interested in accounts of globalization from local subject positions (and how in turn local subjects are not alien to globalization) is well illustrated in Delmaire's poem *Favela*, where Delmaire expresses and connects his own

liminality with a global wound that is in this case represented by Brazilian favelas.

3.2 The analysis of poems

3.2.1 Analysis of four printed poems from school syllabuses and anthologies

LA EXTRANJERA

By Gabriela Mistral

A Francis de Miomandre

*Habla con dejo de sus mares bárbaros,
con no sé qué algas y no sé qué arenas;
reza oración a dios sin bulto y peso,
envejecida como si muriera.
Ese huerto nuestro que nos hizo extraño,
ha puesto cactus y zarpadas hierbas*

*Alienta del resuello del desierto
y ha amado con pasión de que blanquea,
que nunca cuenta y que si nos contase
sería como el mapa de otra estrella.*

*Vivirá entre nosotros ochenta años,
pero siempre será como si llega,
hablando lengua que jadea y gime*

*y que le entienden sólo bestezuelas.
Y va a morir en medio de nosotros,
en una noche en la que más padezca,
con sólo su destino por almohada,
de una muerte callada y extranjera.*

***La Extranjera*⁵⁷ (The Stranger)**

INITIAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION⁵⁸ MY LITERAL TRANSLATION

She speaks in her way of her savage seas	She speaks with neglect of her barbaric seas, With I don't know which algae and I don't know which sands;
With unknown algae and unknown sands.	She prays to a formless, weightless god, Aged, as if dying
She prays to a formless, weightless god, Aged, as if dying.	In our kitchen garden that she turned strange
In our garden now so strange	She has planted cactus and thorny herbs.
She has planted cactus and alien grass.	
The desert zephyr fills her with its breath	She breathes with the panting/gasping of the desert
And she has loved with a fierce, white passion	And she has loved with a passion that turns her white
She never speaks of it, for if she were to tell	She never speaks of it, for if she were to tell
It would be like the face of unknown stars.	It would be like the face of another star.
Among us she may live for eighty years, Yet always as if newly come,	Among us she may live for eighty years,

⁵⁷ This poem was originally published in Mistral's book *Tala*, in 1938

⁵⁸ In www.allpoetry.com

strangeness, a structure that progressively deepens and consolidates the division between our world and the stranger's. The first verses put her subversive strangeness in opposition to our "kitchen garden". The first set of verses closes with "she has turned **our** garden **strange**" and "she has planted cactus and **thorny** herbs", accusations that the stranger can only be a bad influence on 'us'. The second part of the poem expels the stranger as far as possible from the normative space occupied by the poem. Finally, the last verses close the poem dramatically by declaring the impossibility of her belonging: "she will die in our midst ... with only her fate as a pillow".

Critics have highlighted that the metaphor of travel is a fundamental element in Latin American literary and cultural production (e.g, Silviano Santiago 2004). However, the dislocation of *la Extranjera* and her arrival in a world where she does not fit in becomes "not only a trope for movement, transference and contact among disparate cultural spaces but also a metaphor for the creation, rereading and translation" (Goulart de Almeida 2004:10). Particularly, the metaphor of the new-born *Extranjera* emerging from the waters is interesting because it shows Mistral reworking established poetic stereotypes. She inflects the image of a mermaid-like creature with the cosmological system of water spirit mythology,⁶¹ inscribing the poem in Amerindian conceptions of natural issues and relationship to the land.

La Extranjera is focused on the existential hardships of living at a cultural intersection. The trajectory followed by the poem suggests a tragic and isolated fate for those representing the other in the poem's imaginative community. The poem implies that being is only possible, from the point of view of the poem's speaking voice, if it is speaking, knowing and loving within the speaker's conventions. The primary figurative affiliation in the poem appears to be

⁶¹ In indigenous Aymara cognition, spirits inhabit not heaven but surrounding high mountains, rivers, lakes, and so on; or rather, those sacred places are personified spirits.

towards an inhospitable, wild, natural world. Mistral uses different features to highlight the contrasting ways of understanding the indigenous and barbaric world of “the stranger”, as opposed to a westernized and civilized way of knowing and living. The epithet “barbaric” is used to describe the stranger’s indigenous origins (and the poet’s claimed roots) in opposition to the dominating westernized culture in Latin America. Several images illustrate a special communion between *la Extranjera* and the Earth and nature (cosmos included) that metonymically refers to an indigenous Amerindian understanding of life. Not only does she talk differently but her personified language “pants and whines”. Her language has a different texture, a different rhythm, and it is uncivilized because only tiny beasts understand it. She prays to an unknown god, an indigenous god who has no materiality, in contrast to the materiality of Catholic symbols. Also, she talks differently and loves differently, furiously, in an unimaginable way that could only be attributed to stellar forces (crucial in Andean cosmologies⁶²), which have the power to turn her white.

An evaluative voice speaking in the first person and present tense serves the purpose of talking about otherness in a vivid and immediate manner, compelling the reader to assume the speaker’s perspective as opposed to the stranger’s. The receiver of the message, a plural reader or audience (‘us’), is invited to share the observer’s opinions and to admit the poet figure’s strangeness and inadequacy in our Western world. The stranger’s interstitial space of belonging is what makes the inadequacy of the arrival of the Extranjera’s presence in a world to which she does not belong. Considering that young people in Spanish school education receive little instruction about Latin

⁶² The veneration of Pachamama survives today. In Andean cosmologies, Pachamama is the Cosmic Mother, or Mother Nature. She is the manifest universe that we know, and within Her is another sphere, called Ashpamama, or Earth Mother. Quechua and Aymara peoples (Mistral was of Aymara descent) continue to view nature as animate today.

American cultural particularities, information about Amerindian cosmologies would be relevant to allow a distinctive way of understanding the poem from the postcolonial perspective highlighted here. The stranger's existential otherness draws profoundly on the poet's Amerindian roots, something that is a constant in Mistral's work. This poem can be seen as emerging from what Bhabha called the creative potential of "cultural interstices" (1994:4) that is produced when different cultural traditions intersect. By examining poetic devices with postcolonial lenses young people could, for example, understand how Gabriela Mistral reflects on her European Basque-Indigenous Amerindian background in her writing. However, young audiences would also benefit from framing a reading of *la Extranjera* within an understanding of how colonial encounters in Latin America produced mixed literary cultures where "the European traditions of witches, goblins and fairy tales mingle with the Andean and African traditions of the spirits of water, jungles and mountains" (Montoya 2003:104). Fables, myths, stories about the creation of the universe and mankind - the salvation myths of deities, the deep symbolism of Pachamama (mother earth), legends like Achachila (deity of Andean cosmology mythology), of the coca, the potato, tobacco and others, emerge from oral traditions and constitute the foundations of pre-Columbian cultures. Images coming from the heights, like rain or Condor, are symbols of impregnating and fertilising Pachamama. Also, Andean approaches to ambiguous beings such as siren-type beings "tend to focus on their creative aspects, as well as the destructive and corrupting associations that dominate orthodox Christianity" (Austern and Naroditskaya 2006:115).

Mistral, from a distinctively Pan-American perspective that stands apart from the dominant Western tradition, chooses words, images, rhythms and structures in *La Extranjera* that condense and magnify, in a dramatic way, the painful feelings of not belonging anywhere. Other contemporary female poets

like Grace Nichols or Gioconda Belli have expressed and are still expressing this condition in a similar fashion,⁶³ making feminine perspectives interestingly intersect with their postcolonial condition.

⁶³ An example is Grace Nichols' poem *Wherever I hang*.

JARDIN DE FRANCE

by Léopold Sédar Senghor

*Calme jardin,
Grave jardin,
Jardin aux yeux baissés au soir
Pour la nuit,
Peines et rumeurs,
Toutes les angoisses bruissantes de la Ville
Arrivent jusqu'à moi, glissant sur les toits lisses,
Arrivent à la fenêtre
Penchée, tamisées par feuilles menues et tendres et pensive*

*Mains blanches,
Gestes délicats,
Gestes apaisants.*

*Mais l'appel du tam-tam
bondissant
par monts*

*Qui l'apaisera, mon cœur,
A l'appel du tam-tam
bondissant
véhément,
lancinant?*

GARDEN OF FRANCE (translated)

By Léopold Sédar Senghor

Calm garden

Solemn garden

Garden with eyes lowered/bent down to the evening

To the night

Sorrows and rumbles

All the noisy anguishes of the city

Coming up to where I am, slipping/sliding over the smooth/plain roofs

Come up to the window

Stretched out, sieved by slight and tender and thinking leaves

White hands

Delicate gestures

Soothing gestures

But the tam-tam bounding

through mountains

and

continents,

Who will soothe it, my heart,

At the call of the tam-tam

leaping

vehement

nagging?

The Senegalese poet Sédar Senghor, who was physically located in France when he wrote *Jardin de France*, explored in this poem how he was deeply affected by the difficulty of living between two different cultural perceptions of the world. Although less dramatic than *La extranjera*, *Jardin de France* also expresses the painful feelings of solitude that the poet's condition encompasses. The lines that Senghor chooses to close the poem with, a rhetorical question, "who will soothe my heart...?", illustrate well the author's intention to convey his desolation by acting as a plea to the audience/reader.

The poem is divided into two parts mirroring the author's feelings of division between two 'worlds'. A few short verses are used as transition:

Mains blanches,

Gestes délicats,

Gestes apaisants

The contrast between this strophe and the following one is highlighted by the way the verses are laid out on the page. These verses form the controlled geometric shape of a rectangle, while the verses in the next strophe break away from the previous symmetrical pattern and develop a staircase shape which enacts the leaping rhythm that the author is intending to convey: the uncontrollable, vivid and abrupt call of Africa.

Mais l'appel du tam-tam

bondissant

par monts

et

continents

The rhythm of the poem accelerates from the transition verses onwards. Once the *tam-tam* is introduced, not only does the movement of the poem change visually but the rhymes between verses become more regular. Repetitions (anaphora and epistrophe) convey rhythm to the poem while helping to foreground several aspects of it.

Calme jardin, grave jardin, jardin..

Gestes..., gestes...

The call of the *tam-tam*, an African percussion instrument that is similar to a gong, allegorizes Senghor's longing for Africa. This onomatopoeic "tam-tam" mirrors (in French) the sound that the instrument produces when it is played with the hands, and it also symbolizes the rhythm of Africa, mimetically representing the poet's African roots.

Indeed, the central issue of the poem is the collision of two symbolic images. On one hand the garden, the poet's actual context, symbolizes France and a Western way of understanding the world. On the other hand, the *tam-tam* symbolizes Africa and materializes Senghor's nostalgia. It is the dialogic co-occurrence of these two central figures which constructs the strength of *Jardin de France*. The first part of the poem foregrounds the garden but the weight then shifts to the *tam-tam*, whose distant call is more powerful and real than the garden's presence and influence. Senghor depicts non-African noises as being "opposed to real noises, which are the ones that we hear in Africa" (Hausser 1988:22). The two motifs, garden and tam-tam, are held in conflict and illustrate a personal dilemma. The garden's domain is ambiguous because it is linked to both "creeping, sliding" feelings of anguish and to delicate white soothing hands. The *tam-tam*, on the other hand, is a straightforward and urgent call.

Various cultural conceptions and preconceptions dialogically contend even in the sonic texture of the poem. Senghor illustrates his feelings of displacement with recurrent contrasts at different levels in the poem. The images he displays and the verbs he uses contrast European white movement with the African black movement with which Senghor affiliates himself and that was the primary identification of “Negritude”. The poem shifts from controlled to abrupt movements, from delicate gestures to a vigorous percussion call, from “slipping, sliding” to “leaping and jumping”. Calmness and solemnity creep and slip silently, while the strength of Africa’s appeal is almost audible to the reader. The differences in significance are measurable: the calmness of the garden is able to stretch and travel across a city, while the movement associated with the poet’s African roots crosses mountains and continents. Other devices, like the personification of certain items, also help to convey a very perceptible and detailed movement: a garden with eyes, a city with anguishes, and anguishes that are allowed a peculiar and meaningful mobility.

Elements like poem structure, line display and lexical choices highlight the liminal space existing between life’s movements and rhythms in Europe, where the poem is written, and the poet’s African origins. In evidencing some of the formal elements that Senghor displays in *Jardin de France* I have intended to illustrate how he strongly conveys the ambiguous and troubling feelings caused by the negotiation of a cultural space and identity inherent to the poet’s postcolonial condition.

LA MURALLA

By Nicolas Guillén

*Para hacer esta muralla,
tráiganme todas las manos:
los negros sus manos negras,
los blancos sus manos blancas.*

*Ay,
una muralla que vaya
desde la playa hasta el monte,
desde el monte hasta la playa,
allá sobre el horizonte.*

*- ¡Tun, tun!
- ¿Quién es?
- Una rosa y un clavel
- ¡Abre la muralla!
- ¡Tun, tun!
- ¿Quién es?
- El sable del coronel
- ¡Cierra la muralla!
- ¡Tun, tun!
- ¿Quién es?
- La paloma y el laurel
- ¡Abre la muralla!
- ¡Tun, tun!
- ¿Quién es?
El alacrán y el ciempiés
- ¡Cierra la muralla!*

*Al corazón del amigo,
abre la muralla;
al veneno y al puñal,
cierra la muralla;
al mirto y la yerbabuena,
abre la muralla;
al diente de la serpiente,
cierra la muralla;
al ruiseñor en la flor,
abre la muralla*

*Alcemos una muralla
juntando todas las manos;
los negros, sus manos negras,
los blancos, sus blancas manos.
Una muralla que vaya
desde la playa hasta el monte,
desde el monte hasta la playa,
allá sobre el horizonte*

THE WALL (translated)

By Nicolas Guillén

For us to build this wall,
bring me all the hands:
the black their hands black,
the white their hands white.

Aye,
A wall that stretches
from the beach to the mountain,
from the mountain to the beach,
there over the horizon.

- Knock, knock!

1) Who's there?

- A rose and a carnation

- Open the wall!

- Knock, knock!

- Who's there?

- The colonel's saber

- Close the wall!

- Knock, knock!

- Who's there?

- The pigeon and the laurel

- Open the wall!

- Knock, knock!

- Who's there?

- The scorpion and the centipede
- Close the wall!

To the heart of a friend,
open the wall;
To the poison and the dagger,
close the wall;
To the myrtle and mint,
open the wall;
To the snake's teeth,
close the wall;
to the nightingale in the flower,
open the wall.

Let us raise a wall
putting together all the hands
the black, their hands black,
the white, their white hands.

La Muralla invites us to imagine its central motif, a wall, from a point of view that challenges the association between walls and division. Instead, the poem attaches a significance to the wall of cooperation and unity. The poem focuses on cooperation and equality but starts quite ironically with an unbalanced relationship between the speaker and the audience. The voice of the poet appears in the first verse as an authoritative landowner, an organizer giving orders and commanding what appears to be a crowd of workers. The speaker seems to be placed on a promontory from which he can see, far away, a construction site that appears to occupy the whole island of Cuba. The reader, as part of a plural addressee, is addressed and compelled in a direct and immediate way: 'you bring me'. The voice changes into a cooperative plural first person in the last stanza:

"let's raise a wall".

This shift illustrates the author's intention to show different perspectives and different ways of building knowledge in his analogy of building a wall. The poem works as a metonymic explanation of how knowledge can be built (from a single perspective, to a dialogue and finally to plural perspectives) by describing how a wall is built, or rather how the knowledge of a particular wall is built. The transition from a singular voice to plural voices is mediated by the introduction of a call and response pattern that changes voices alternately in a dynamic dialogue. The call and response form, very common in Caribbean popular tradition, seems like a game to teach us what a wall is (in a way different from the most common understanding of a wall), so that once we have learned it we can also participate in its construction.

The most brutal part of the Caribbean colonial past, slavery, is evoked in the first stanza with a synecdoche (hands used to refer to people). Hands are figuratively taken for objects and consequently people are treated like objects. Although both black and white hands are named, the poet introduces a hyperbaton changing the order of the adjective "white" in the last verse of the parallelism. This foregrounds the idea that, yes, "white hands" also have to work on the construction of the wall. The intentional inversion "manos blancas-blancas manos" reminds us that racial issues were intermingled with working status as part of the Spanish colonial legacy in pre-revolutionary Cuba. The norm was that white hands were not used to doing any work. This wall is therefore extraordinary because its meaning and construction differ from the norm.

Although Guillén does not use a vernacular voice here, and his aspirations are universal, he manages to convey an idea of Cubanness by combining some symbolic images (the Cuban mint, the military dagger, the snake, mountain and

sea, black and white) with more universal ones (the laurel and the pigeon). The mountain is foregrounded as being as Cuban as the beach, gaining distance from the tastelessness of tourist images of Caribbean islands. The repetition of the hyperbaton from the mountain to the sea and back again embraces the whole island. Also, the allusion to the horizon at the end of the poem highlights the intention of the poem to extend Guillén's ideal of intercultural coexistence and interracial understanding universally, since this allusion metonymically represents a world-wide geography.

Despite *La Muralla's* visible universal vocation, the postcolonial reading of it demonstrates the relevance of being attentive to the elements in the poem that go beyond what "some criticism disdained as mere folklore" (Marquez and McMurray 2003:xv) and highlight expressions of local "popular experience and creole culture like those Guillén personified and defended" (ibid). Focusing on the central aspect of knowledge construction in *La Muralla*, I have emphasized Guillén's intention and ability to decolonize Eurocentric processes of knowledge production.

I have focused here on a close analysis of a few elements of Guillén's poem. However, the contextualisation of *La Muralla*, as of the next poem, Aimé Césaire's *Demain*, might prove crucial to helping young audiences understand the significance of poems that seem to control conflict through exhortation to an ideal while being framed in a poetry production that was characterized by a "combative tone and atmosphere of anguish and accusation" (Marquez and McMurray 2003:xi).

DEMAIN

by Aimé Césaire

Je suppose que le monde soit une forêt. Bon!
Il y a des baobabs, du chêne vif, des sapins noirs, du noyer blanc;
Je veux qu'ils poussent tous, bien fermes et drus, différents
de bois, de ports, de couleur,
mais pareillement pleins de sève et sans que l'un empiète
sur l'autre,
différents à leur base
mais oh!
que leurs têtes se rejoignent oui très haut dans l'éther
égal à ne former pour tous
qu'un seul toit
je dis l'unique toit tutélaire...

TOMORROW (translated)

by Aimé Césaire

I take the world to be a forest. Right!
There are baobabs, lively oak, black fir, the hickory tree;
I want them all to grow, strong and dense, each different
by wood, aspect, colour,
but equally filled with sap and with none encroaching
on another,

different at their base
but oh!
may their heads meet yes high up in the ether
equivalent to forming for all
just one roof
I say the only protective roof...

Demain is a poem about hope for the future, as its title (*Tomorrow*) suggests. It is a wish for a future human understanding focused on interracial coexistence. The central theme of the poem is “to entertain difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 1994:5), something which, according to Hommi Bhabha, constitutes the essence of cultural hybridity. The line “with none encroaching on another” seems to echo Bhabha’s idea. The central lines of the poem are structured in a way that alternately highlight differences in aspect and similarities in essence.

“**Different** de bois, de port, de couleur

but....”

“**different** a la base

but oh!”

Césaire introduces the poem with a simile that compares forests to the world, making it clear, from the beginning, how the images in the lines have to be understood. This method of making the terms clear from the beginning seems to mirror Césaire’s expressed intention that the work *Et si les chiens se taisent* (which this poem is part of) should act as a foundation for understanding his

later poetry production. From the first line, the voice of the poem seems to assume a didactic tone. Senghor chooses to concentrate all the weight of his allegorical idealization of human coexistence on exploring how tree species and the forest can represent different ethnic groups and humanity as a whole. The immediacy that the present tense confers on the poet's explanations of his idealized visions of humankind is quite palpable in the second line, where the poet enumerates a set of different types of tree species. The direct personification of trees in the last strophe of the poem, 'may their heads meet yes high up in the ether'', foregrounds this idea. Césaire also uses the authority of his own voice to emphasize his dream of human unity, represented by "just one roof", to close the poem. (I take the world, I want them, I say.)

Two interjections give the poem an oral flavour that makes the lines sound more vivid while simultaneously contributing to providing a certain structure. The first "bon!" highlights the explanatory tone of the poem since it serves as confirmation that the initial terms are set out clearly enough. It also introduces a descriptive enumeration of different types of trees and different qualities belonging to them. The second interjection, "oh!", closes the enumerative description of trees and tree qualities and introduces the last lines, which materialize the fraternal dream of the poet and encompass the exhortation of the poem.

The poem closes with two lines that distil the poet's ideal future and meaningfully contain the most marked musical pattern of the poem in a way that foregrounds the significance of its meaning.

Qu'un seul toit

Je dis l'unique toit-tu-telaire (t-t-t)

These two last lines concentrate the poet's exhortation into a wordplay that comprises simultaneous meanings. The word *toit* in French is a homophone of *toi* ('you'). The line "un seul toit" can be read as both 'just one roof' but also 'one only you'. This concentrates in the same line the idea that "you" and "I" share the same essence. This idea is also highlighted by the sequence of sound alliterations in *tutelaire*: *toit* (you-roof) and *tu* (also means you). The poet intentionally ends the poem with a verse that places I (*je*) and you (*toit-tu*) in tight connection, both embraced in the same line by a protective universal element (the roof which is the world's roof, the sky).

Unlike what can be seen in Césaire's other important and more studied works (e.g., his seminal *Cahier du Retour au Pays Natal*, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), the elements highlighted here as contrasting difference and sameness between races and cultures do not reveal a sharp resistant discourse and formal strategy against cultural domination. Instead, this poem works like an exhortation to an ideal of cultural negotiation but against assimilation. It is important to highlight that this poem belongs to an important body of poems (*Et si les Chiens se Taisent*) that the author himself described as foundational for the rest of his future poetic production. This body of work is profoundly resistant to Western cultural domination and was deeply influential for later postcolonial intellectuals like Franz Fanon. According to Victor Figueroa, who comparatively explores the liminality of Césaire and Guillén's poetry, "Césaire's fluctuations between collective enthusiasm [e.g., *Demain*] and intimate despair [e.g., *Cahier*]" (2010: 86) are paradoxes full of significance. This is because "these opposite movements can be related (although not reduced) to a colonial situation that finds expression in Césaire's work and that Césaire write explicitly as attempts to explore and ultimately combat" (ibid). In her analysis of *Black and White in Césaire's work*, Mineke Schipper de Leeuw also points out that "although rage and aggression give often the tone to Césaire's

work" (1969:144) (a fact that is not perceivable here), in the entire body of Césaire's work, "racial and cultural reconciliation is the ultimate objective of the author, rather than his claimed revolt to liberate the people he speaks for"(ibid).

3.2.2 Analysis of two performed poems

Ponzanesi and Blaagard have recently highlighted that cultural interaction and the existential issues of the negotiation of affective belonging that cultural interactions produce are increasingly becoming postcolonial literature's standard subjects (2011:227). From this perspective it seems especially pertinent to discover how this progression could be made evident. This is done by exploring the connections between the Senghor and Mistral poems, written more than 50 years ago, and more contemporary poetry productions that highlight cultural interaction and metaphysical collision "between differing cultural modes for apprehending reality, for determining truth, and for understanding one's relationship within physical and spiritual environments" (Russell 2009: 230).

Next I analyse two digital recordings of authorial performed⁶⁴ poems, focusing on the text and audio-texts of the poem and considering the digital recording as a substantial and non-incidental part of the poet's work, not secondary to any text version. The authorial performance offers, as an advantage for the mediation of poetry for young people, the fact that the physical presence of the poet helps to locate the poet's work within a performance tradition, broadening the understanding of the poet's art (Novak: 2011). For instance, elements of the

⁶⁴ "An actor's rendition, like a type designer's "original" setting of a classic, will not have the same kind of authority as a poet's own reading or the first printing of a work. However, the performance of the poet, just like the visualization of the poem in its initial printings, forever marks the poem's entry into the world; and not only its meaning but also its existence" (Bernstein 1999: 283)

performance of Julian Delmaire help to frame his poetry in the African heritage of his roots but also his physical appearance (a mixed-raced young man with dreadlocks) encourages the young public to frame his art in contemporary counter-hegemonic politics. What the aesthetics of Delmaire's dreadlocks convey, a physical code popular among people of African descent globally⁶⁵, is understood by the audience instantly since the code is understood in popular youth culture.

INICIACION⁶⁶

By Lilian Pallares

Tengo los cabellos enredados en las pupilas

Como ramas de arboles en el otoño

Que se sacuden en la nostalgia del atardecer

Los pollerones blancos se levantan

Y forman remolinos, mariposas

Cabellos de palma

Agua de coco

Y oleaje perpetuo

Cabellos marinos

Afrodisiacos

⁶⁵ Its spread among African liberationists, womanists, radical artists of African descent reflects counterhegemonic politics. (Ajanaku and Kuumba 1998)

⁶⁶ My own transcription from video recorded version of the poem

Y de algas flotantes

Tengo los cabellos aferrados a mis ideas

A mi universo de palabras y versos de amaranto

Se marchan con el viento

Cuando la danza los invita a confundirse con la lluvia

Son cabellos con secretos

Dionisiacos

Ondulantes y noctámbulos

Cabellos solitarios

de música triste

y melancólica fotografía

Cabellos de barro

Ceniza y semilla

INICIATION (translated)

By Lilian Pallares

- 1⁶⁷ I have the hairs⁶⁸ of my head
- 2 tangled in the pupils
- 3 Like tree branches in autumn
- 4 Which shake in the dusk's nostalgia
- 5 The White pollerones (skirts) rise
- 6 Creating whirlwinds, butterflies
- 7 Palm tree hairs
- 8 Coconut water
- 9 And perpetual swell
- 10 Sea Hairs
- 11 Aphrodisiac
- 12 And of floating seaweed

⁶⁷ The performed poems are numbered because of their length

⁶⁸ Note that the poet deliberately uses hair (cabello) in plural form. Although most Spanish speakers would ordinarily refer to a singular form, the plural form stresses the meanings and sensations that the imagery tries to convey, since many hairs reflect better the image of hair units mixing everywhere, like an octopus, tangling,

13 I have the hairs seized onto my ideas

14 To my universe of words and amaranth⁶⁹ verses

15 They leave (go away) with the wind

16 When the dance invites them

17 to blend (to get mixed) with the rain

18 They are secret hairs

19 Dionysian hairs

20 Undulating and nocturnal

21 Solitary hairs

22 of sad music

23 and melancholic photography

24 Hairs made of clay

25 Ash and seed

Iniciacion is a poem in free verse, initially written to be performed. Pallares first performed it at a public social gathering in Madrid. The poem was later

⁶⁹ The amaranth is a typical plant from Central America; its grain is a highly calorific cereal similar to quinoa

incorporated into Pallares' poetry project called Afrolyrics⁷⁰, which consists of different poetry performances accompanied by drums. The illustrative name of this project informs us about the relevance of African rhythms. It has been recently included in a poetry anthology (book with CD) called *Pájaro Vertigo*. *Iniciación* is demonstrative of the poet's emphasis on aurality. Listening to the performed poem can help the audience better understand the poet's choice of words and increase awareness of the poet's craft.

Iniciación (*Initiation*) deals with female puberty. The poet opens her performance by explaining that *Iniciación* is inspired by Bullerengue, a Colombian dance accompanied by percussion instruments and performed by adolescent girls dressed in big white skirts. The dance is a rite of passage to mark the passage to adulthood when female adolescents turn fifteen. The Bullerengue dance is part of Afro-Colombian folklore, an important source of inspiration for Pallares' work. Young people will understand better the undulating rhythm of the poem as metonymically representing a rite of passage if they are first introduced to this Afro-Caribbean tradition.

The images in this poem, namely the poet's hairs and the women's skirts, and the qualities attached to them, help to give the poem a strong sensory texture. The most central figure, the hairs, not only distils the poet's essence but also evoke a feminine collective spirit. The image of the hairs enacts an erotic⁷¹ feminine power, a "vitalist version of spiritual issues" (Tena 2010) that can best be expressed through poetic means. Lilian's feminine style is in line with claims by other contemporary female poets⁷² like Gioconda Belli⁷³: who opposes the

⁷⁰ <http://issuu.com/charlesolsen/docs/afrolyrics>

⁷¹ Erotic as "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (Lorde 1984: 55)

⁷² Bella Clara Ventura (Mexican-Colombian poet) "Nosotros los poetas latinoamericanos estamos dando propuestas de un mundo mucho mas exuberante, mucho mas frondoso.." "no lo

existential depth of sensual Latin American idiosyncrasy to stereotypically colourful but superficial folkloric representations of Latin American cultures⁷⁴. A postcolonial approach to poetry offers a perspective on metaphor that allows for different meaning-making strategies, avoiding simplistic narratives of cultural origin and “tribalistic views from either extreme (that) disfigure the mixed reality of the New World” (Ramazani 2001: 63). Lilian attaches to the symbolic image of her hairs intertwined qualities. These juxtapose canonical Western symbols on the kind of feminine connection to natural elements that dominates the poem. A feminine connection to natural elements is sublimated in the Afro-Caribbean tradition of female transition that the theme of the poem focuses on.

Pallares’ use of the adjective ‘aphrodisiac’ intermingles different literary paradigms in what can be seen as a dialectic between two different ways of sensing the world. In Spanish, the word used is Afrodisiacos. The poet’s performance stresses the sound of the first syllable then breathes before articulating “dionisiacos”. Young audiences will clearly hear how the performance separates the word into two beats. Therefore, two qualities are attributed to the salient figure of “hairs”: “dionisiacos”, a reference to the Greek myth Dionysius (quintessential canonical incarnation of ecstasies and ritual alienation), and the African roots evoked by “Afro”.

The poet’s recitation style is not very dramatic or excessively theatrical but her performance adds an additional layer of corporality to a very sensuous poem. The poet makes use of her hands and body language in her recitation, mirroring the rhythmic clapping of the public gathered around the dancers during

que el Europeo quiero de nosotros” (ref: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kr4K1WAZYKk>). Como un nuevo color que se le esta dando a la literatura

⁷³ Gioconda Belli (1948) is a Nicaraguan poet, feminist critic and political activist. A link to one of her poems recited by her is in Annex 4

⁷⁴ Note the parallelism with the abovementioned claims of Negritude poets.

Bullerengue celebrations. Percussion instruments accompany most of Pallares' recitations of this poem but in the digital recorded performance explored here there is only the poet spontaneously accompanying her recitation with undulating gestures that allude to the movement of the young female dancers' dresses (pollerones). In so doing, the poet foregrounds the undulating rhythm also conveyed by words (e.g., "perpetual swell") and stylistic features in the poem. This demands an attitude of the reader that is grounded in the body in such a way that the experience of listening to the performed poem will leave an imprint on the audience that will influence any later reading of a printed version of *Iniciación*.

The poem's structure seems to divide the verses into two parts. Each different part is introduced by the voice of the poet, in first person, expressing the idea that the hairs are first "tangled in the pupils" and secondly "seized onto my ideas". The poem alternates the two sets of verses in which Pallares uses her own voice with impersonal arrangements of verses that enumerate ideas, qualities and sensations. The verses in first person serve to stress the association (tangle/seize) of the metaphoric use of hairs with the poet's inner subjectivity, represented by "the pupils" and "my ideas".

The first verse of *Iniciación* expresses the pervasiveness of hairs in the poem, whose symbolism will permeate all the spheres of the poet's life. From this time forth, the relevance, fluidity and sensuality of the feminine essence that this image allegorically represents are displayed. The hairs are personified and put in a continuum with elements of nature, tree branches in the first verses, as will continue to be the case throughout the poem.

The second set of verses is focused on a different metaphor. Instead of hairs, the “white big pollerones⁷⁵ (skirts)” are the central image here. These iconic skirts symbolically represent an Afro-Caribbean ritual dance of female maturation. They emphasise the ritual significance that local heritages involve. The moving pollerones symbolize how inner subjectivities are shaken during adolescence. They stress the relevant challenging negotiation of identities. The spiritual vitality evoked by the Caribbean references in *Iniciación* contests superficial exaltations of a Latin American idiosyncrasy associated with picturesque exotic portraits of colourful local folklore. Instead, the Bullerengues’ “white pollerones” inspire Pallares’ spiritually vibrant and sensuous way of perceiving and describing the world, expressing a vision shared by other Latin American female writers of a concept of spirituality that is both indigenist and woman-centred⁷⁶(Hedrik: 2009).

The third and fourth parallel sets of verses contribute to lending a Caribbean air to the music and imagery of the poem. Images of palm trees, coconut water and ocean references are emphasised by analogous verse structures and marked sound patterns. Before the full sense of the poem has been fully assimilated, certain words and rhymes cause a reader of the poem’s text to naturally prolong or diminish the rhythm of the poem. The poet intones the verses, lingering on the final syllables of each word. Particularly in the second set of verses, the poet’s performance emphasises the repetitive sound of “s”, a sensuous sonic strategy that she will repeat in the last two sets of verses of the poem.

⁷⁵ “Pollera” is the noun used in different Latin-American countries for the Spanish “falda” (skirt). Its use usually refers to traditional skirts of the kind used in folkloric celebrations. Here the word is used in a superlative form (pollera/pollerones).

⁷⁶ Like female poets Anzaldúa and Mistral’s images related to “biological race mixture as an avenue to spiritual, racial and cultural harmony” (Hedrik 2009:70). Hedrik’s analysis of the Mistral’s *Beber* is pertinent here as it explores Mistral’s poetic articulation of “a pan-Indoamerican and ultimately woman-centered, mestiza vision” (2009:83)

<i>Cabellos de palma</i>	7 Palm tree hairs
<i>Agua de coco</i>	8 Coconut water
<i>Y oleaje perpetuo</i>	9 And perpetual swell
<i>Cabellos marinos</i>	10 Sea Hairs
<i>Afrodisiacos</i>	11 Aphrodisiac
<i>Y de algas flotantes</i>	12 And of floating seaweed

In the second part of the poem, Pallares proclaims the vital sensuality of her work, announcing that her verses are made of amaranth, a local highly calorific grain. Pallares' verses are metaphorically depicted as highly nutritious and portrayed as rooted in nature (in the local landscape of her own roots), and as nourishing as the grain they are made of. As is a common feature in Pallares' work, she compares life⁷⁷ with Caribbean fruit and seeds. The reference to amaranth is meaningfully followed by a verse where personified hairs have the ability to go with the wind and even blend with the rain. These elements can be perceived as expressions of how the poet's subjectivity and body can be taken as prolongations of the earth and as part of the forces of nature. This resonates with Mistral's *La Extranjera* in its indigenous connection with Earth and nature.

The last couplet beautifully resumes the theme of how the poet's feminine, bodily way of sensing and being in the world, deeply rooted in nature,

⁷⁷ God is Lulo, God is the fruit" *Lulo* (Pallares). She often displays images of pregnancy.

permeates life from the beginning (seeds) to the end (ashes). Hairs are linked to the physical world, perishable and mortal (made of clay⁷⁸), but they are also part of nature's cycle of life, as the references to seeds and ash illustrate. The alliteration of "s" sounds in the last verse (senisa se-milla), which the poet lingers on in her performance, closes the poem with a voluptuous intonation that mirrors the undulating images and general rhythm of the poem. These sound patterns and effects, enacted by the recitation of Pallares, are not secondary but constitutive of the meaning of *Iniciacion*.

The poet's essence can be seen as being in communion with elements like the wind, rain, seeds, trees etc. but "the hairs" also claim a space within these elements of her own feminine individuality. The negotiation of her identity is contradictorily described as being identifiable with both a collective self that is a prolongation of nature, and secret and private spaces.

⁷⁸ A symbol of biblical inspiration: "men were created from the clay of the earth".

ROUGE

By Julian Delmaire⁷⁹

*Souvenirs d'avant l'aurore
quand je n'étais encore*

*qu'une pluie de mystère, un frisson sur la terre
un fragment d'élément - un amas de sentiments
pas vraiment définis
une parcelle d'infini*

*Le tambour d'avant ma vie
celui qui battait au rythme d'un cœur*

*inconnu
j'étais nu - dans la tiédeur de la nuit
je nageais sur un nuage de suie
j'essayais de me frayer un passage vers le jour
vers le front du tambour
mais le compte à rebours
m'a poussé jusqu'au bord
d'un soleil
qui brûlait mes oreilles*

*et qui m'éblouissait
comme un joyau vermeil*

J'entends le tambour qui rugit sur la terre

*Le balafon de feu
qui bat sous mes paupières
La lueur de l'aurore - la sueur de l'effort
le fouet qui dévore
la chaleur carnivore*

*Le coton emballé
le rhum étranglé
les hommes empilés*

*au fond d'une cale d'infortune
pour une escale au jardin des supplices*

⁷⁹ Extrait du recueil "Nègres" éditions Périplans

*un grand de champ de cicatrice
les traces de mon passé
se finissent dans une flaque..*

*Flash-back - Le vent claque sur ma nuque
le souvenir de l'Afrique
qui revient en syncope
sous mon crâne
comme une brûlure de clope
comme le jus de la canne
dans la bouche du cyclope !*

SABAR !

SABAR !

Sabar - pour mon étoile dans son filet

*Sabar ! lion de sang farouche
ballet noir des mouches autour du soleil*

*Sabar ! bouteille abandonnée
dans les ruelles malades
Offrande de pommade
aux nomades de la nuit*

*Sabar ! muscles tendus du bois d'ébène
qui s'abandonne à la canne*

*Sabar ! écorce qu'on force
pour atteindre la sève*

*aurore avortée
pour retenir mon rêve*

Sabar ! note bleue tatouée sur la surface de l'aube

Jazz ! en phase avec mes mots et mes phrases

*Dérobés à ma langue
papillon-négrillon
qui s'extraît de sa gangue d'argile
le serpent agile
qui se mesure aux murs
et réduit au silence les forteresses*

*qui se dressent
comme des miradors*

quand ma mémoire s'endort

*ROUGE ! ma mémoire – au bout du petit matin
ROUGE ! mon espoir dans le brasier du destin*

ROUGE !

*Les tambours me ramènent à la vie -l'envie à nouveau
irrigue mes veines
je vois l'avenir se lever et le vent avaler
le voile qui m'aveuglait*

ROUGE ! djembé de sable

*ROUGE ! gros ka qui gronde dans le ventre de l'ogre
ROUGE ! rhum de sang qui m'enivre, mes sens qui se délivrent
ROUGE ! tam-tams qui témoignent
ROUGE ! la peur qui s'éloigne
ROUGE ! la boue qui me lave de moi-même
ROUGE ! le sourire de la femme que j'aime*

ROUGE !

*Le parfum de la foule
quand je me faufile
et mes pas foulent le sol*

ROUGE ! ma folie qui vacille

*ROUGE ! la flamme de la brindille
l'étoile qui scintille
le filet qui s'étiole
et ma fierté qui vole à nouveau sur la ville !*

ROUGE !

RED⁸⁰ (translated)⁸¹

By Julian Delmaire



Illustration 3

1 Memories from before dawn

2 When I was not yet

3 More than a mystery rain

4 A shiver over the earth

5 An element's fragment

6 A pile/heap of feelings

7 Not really defined

8 An infinite's plot/are

⁸⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfiAXly2lvQ>.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d5R5HjcqeE>

⁸¹ English translation from the original version transcribed from video recording. Both transcription and translation are made by the researcher, Maria Luisa Alonso

- 9 The drum from before my life
- 10 The one that beat
- 11 At an unknown heart's rhythm
- 12 I was naked in the night's tepidness
- 13 I swam over a sooty cloud
- 14 Trying to open up a pathway towards the day
- 15 Towards the front of the drum
- 16 But the countdown pushed me
- 17 To the edge of a sun
- 18 That burnt my ears
- 19 And that blinded me
- 20 Like a ruby/auburn jewel
- 21 Now I hear the drum
- 22 Roaring over the earth
- 23 The fire "balafon"
- 24 Beating beneath my eyelids
- 25 The dawn's glow
- 26 The effort's sweat
- 27 The devouring whip
- 28 The carnivore heat
- 29 The packed cotton

- 30 The strangled rum
- 31 The men piled up
- 31 At the bottom of a misfortune “cale” (deck)
- 33 To stop over a “torture’s garden”
- 34 A big field of scars
- 35 The prints/marks from my past
- 36 Finishing in a puddle
- 37 Flash back
- 38 The wind flaps/slams in my neck
- 39 The memory from Africa
- 40 Coming back on a fainting fit
- 41 Beneath my skull
- 42 Like a fag’s burn mark
- 43 Like the cane’s juice
- 44 In the Cyclopes’ mouth
- 45 SABAR!
- 46 Sabar – for my memory of broken glass
- 47 SABAR!
- 48 Sabar for my star in its net
- 49 SABAR!

50 Untamed lion's blood

51 Black ballets of flies around the sun

52 SABAR!

53 Abandoned bottle

54 In the sick little streets (back alleys?)

55 Balm offering

56 For the night wonderers/nomads

57 SABAR!

58 Ebony wood's tense muscles

59 Abandoned to the cane

60 SABAR!

61 Bark forced to get the sage

62 Aborted dawn to retain my dream

63 Blue note tattooed over the daybreak surface

64 Jazz in harmony

65 With my words and sentences

66 Stolen from my tongue

67 Black-negrillon⁸² butterfly

68 Extracted from its clay gangue (envelope but also veinstone)

69 The agile snake that measures itself in the walls

70 And reduces to silence the fortresses

71 That raise like miradors

72 When my memory falls to sleep⁸³

73 RED!

74 My memory after sunrise

75 RED!

76 My hope in the destiny's blaze

77 RED!

78 The drums bring me back to life

79 Again the desire drains my veins

80 I see the future rising up and the wind

81 Swallowing the veil that blinded me

82 RED!

⁸² French aphorism that means a child of black race or a child of dark skin

⁸³ In the version registered on CD, the poem includes several additional verses that are not included in any of the performed versions that I had access to. In these verses, the poet explains that he is a "nègre (negro) is generally an offensive term but that some black people have claimed it as their own) made in France" and that "the only cotton (he) had ever dealt with is the cotton of (his) bed-pillow"

83 Sand Djembé⁸⁴ drum

84 RED!

85 Gran *ka* roaring in the ogre's belly

86 RED!

87 Blood rum that makes me drunk

88 My feelings breaking free

89 RED!

90 Tam tams witnessing

91 RED!

92 The sadness that draws away

93 RED!

94 The mud that washes me from myself

95 RED!

96 The smile of the woman I love

97 RED!

98 The perfume of the crowd when I snake in and out

99 And my footsteps trample the ground/floor⁸⁵

⁸⁴ A kind of West African drum known to inspire peace and calm

⁸⁵ Delmaire plays here with the verb "fouler". Fouler le sol means to walk or to put one's feet in a country's ground but also means to beat the ground repeatedly. Fouler means to press something repeatedly with hands, feet or other mechanical means.

100 RED!

101 My madness wobbles

102 The twig's flame

103 My star sparking (only in some performances)

104 My net becoming paler

105 And my pride that flies again over the city

106 RED!

107 RED!

108 RED!

Julian Delmaire wrote *Rouge* for performance at a poetry event eight years ago. He recited it for the first time at a poetry slam in Lille, the French city where he lived. It has been performed many times since on different occasions, including poetry festivals for the general public⁸⁶ as well as events for the young public and poetry workshops that the author conducts with young people. The poem has also been included in a CD/ book anthology called *Negres*.

Delmaire usually precedes his performances with a brief but helpful introduction to help young people locate the experience in a specific framework. In this, the poet explains to his audience the influence of Negritude poetry, particularly Aimé Césaire's⁸⁷, in his work, not only from an aesthetic perspective but also from a moral and ethical point of view. As Delmaire

⁸⁶ This includes the International Festival de poesia de Medellin, Festival Hors Limites de biliotheques ...

⁸⁷ "Césaire reste une boussole, une référence, un idéal" From his blog

acknowledges when he presents the digital recording of the performance that I analysed: *Rouge* is a "tribute to my first love in poetry which was the poetry of Negritude"⁸⁸. Also, the poet explains that *Rouge* "talks a lot about percussion and roots". *Rouge* is a long and rich poem that allows for many more analytical possibilities than I am able to cover here. I concentrate on a closer examination of images and stylistic devices associated with percussion because they can be perceived as highly aesthetic expressions of the poet's complex identity search. Percussion constitutes the most noticeable and pervasive image of the poem. It is especially relevant because it enacts the poet's subject position between different cultural systems.

Rouge (Red) is a complex and quite long poem built around different passages⁸⁹, as if the poet were witnessing different scenes of a film in a delirium and translating them to the audience through different poetic strategies. In the performance analysed here, Delmaire makes subtle gestures with his hands every now and then as if he were framing visions.

Delmaire's insistence on the word *Rouge* helps draw the attention of young audiences, as well as the fact that he uses this colour's name to entitle the poem, instead of black, for a text that deals with African roots and which is performed by a black poet who introduces his performance by expressing his admiration for Negritude poets. The presence of the mixed-race poet adds significance to this strategy in the performed poem since the title foregrounds the poet's preference for his blood and heart's colour, as representing connection to his ancestries, rather than his skin colour. The poem alludes to the negotiation of the French poet's African roots but Delmaire tries to emancipate himself from the idea of racial differentiation, which served as an excuse for colonial

⁸⁸ "En hommage a mes premiers amours en poésie qui était justement la poésie de la négritude.

⁸⁹ Assemblies of poetic materials compose the different scenes, which the poet separates with prolonged breathing pauses, allowing the audience to construct a certain narrative structure.

domination and crimes whose painful memory haunts the poet's imagination. The pulsating emotions that the symbolic use of the colour red conveys are stressed in a compelling call and response pattern in the last part of the poem, built around the call RED! Also, a triple repetition of "RED RED RED", pronounced with different timbres, constitutes the last words of the poem.

The first verses situate red, heart, drums and memories in the same spectrum, establishing the association that the poem will develop between the title and the poet's inner burning emotions linked to throbbing memories (an "unknown heart's rhythm", a sun that burns and blinds "like a ruby jewel"). The centrality of percussion in this poem reflects the poet's inner palpitating identity search. This is a compelling metaphysical negotiation between his distant but haunting African roots and his position as a French-born urban man ("a negro made in France") who says that the only cotton he has "ever needed to handle is the one his pillow is made of". The effect is to envelope the audience, from the poem's title to the conclusion, in all the symbolic allusions and sounds that the poet develops and associates with "red" all through the poem ("RED! My memory after sunrise/RED! My hope in destiny's blaze").

The poem puts poetic resources that evoke the African heritage of the poet's roots in dialogue with urban Western allusions; some of them would certainly be more easily identifiable to young people than others. For instance, Delmaire's superimposition of visceral images of clear African inspiration ("savage lion's blood") on equally visceral but obviously urban and contemporary metaphors ("abandoned bottle in the sick little streets, balm offering for the night nomads") can be enhanced by Delmaire's recitation style. His recitation style can help young audiences link the poet's contemporary Western urban reality with the African memories evoked by a number of images, and how the poet feels deeply as part of his roots. However, to

understand how Delmaire's performance draws from the West African folklore from his African roots but is framed in his French urban metropolitan life young people will need some contextualization. He mixes different manners of recitation, going from a hip hop-like manner for articulating some verses to a hypnotic way of articulating sets of verses at a monotonous fast pace (pronounced almost without breathing) that produces an effect similar to the frenetic beatings of Sabar drums during Sabar dances. Certain knowledge about African percussion traditions could help young audiences frame this performance better into a postcolonial framework. Sabar is the name of a drum but also a traditional highly energetic West African dance which is performed to the beats of the Sabar drum. Delmaire segues from hip hop, intoning verses like "celui qui battait au rythme" to a more neutrally inflected but hypnotic pronunciation of verses that succeed each other without conjunctions, then slows down the pace in "comme un joyeau vermeil" and then jumps into the percussively grating sound of verses like:

"le **ba**lafon de feu qui

23 The "balafon" fire

bat sous me **pau**/p**ie**rres"

24 Beating beneath my eyelids

or the sound of the rhyme:

"le coton⁹⁰ emb**allé**

the packed cotton

le rhum etrang**lé**

the strangled rum

les hommes empil**és**"

the men piled up

⁹⁰ The onomatopoeic pronunciation of cotton in French stresses the two syllables in a way that (differently from English) can be heard as two drum beats: **co**/ **ton**

Intertwined metaphorical descriptions of slavery dominate the poem, and memories from the painful past of the African diaspora also compel the poet and are transmitted to the audience through drum-like impulses. The parallel anaphoric verses (the...the...the...) in asyndeton present pictures of slavery as snapshots of the poet's hallucinations:

la sueur de l'effort	the effort's sweat
le fouet qui dévore	the devouring whip
Le coton emballé	the packed cotton
le rhum étranglé	the strangled rum
les hommes empilés	the men piled up

Percussion instruments and beats portray and express a pain physically felt in the body of the poet which is not solely apprehensible by the rational mind ⁹¹. The first image of a drum appears in the poem after a few introductory verses. The "drum from before my life" (verse 9) is associated with heart beats and followed by a series of verses recited almost without breathing. After a pause (the poet stops after "ruby jewel") a new drum appears, "Now I hear the drum" (verse 21), introducing a new set of verses that are again recited breathlessly. This drum symbolizes the pain of the poet's African ancestors as a consequence of slavery. It is felt deeply, viscerally: a "'balafon' fire" that beats "beneath my eyelids" and transcends the body of the poet since it "roars over the earth" (verses 22-24). The pulsating impulses expressed by the way in which this set of

⁹¹ In fact, in a longer version of this poem (registered on CD) one additional passage describes in detail the poet being out of his mind (drunk).

verses is syncopated in the performance are also conveyed by the words in the verse “coming back in a fainting fit” (verse 40). These drums embody a powerful collective energy (silenced and repressed but not suppressed) from a cultural heritage that is felt to be a universal creative force by the poet. This energy is portrayed as universal because it precedes life, goes beyond the earth (the edge of a sun) and roars over it.

A new scene, opening with an interjection, “flash back” (37), that highlights a cinematographic presentation of scenes, roots Delmaire in the present. The poet sounds the syllables of the onomatopoeic verses, “flaaaash back” and “the wind flaps in (his) neck”, interweaving and syncopating them with “the memory of Africa” that “comes back in a fainting fit beneath the skull” (40). This scene, focused on memory, links past and present like memory does. The preceding verses focusing on the poet’s origins (past) are linked with the poet’s current situation as pictured at the end of the poem (present). Both the contemporary urban Western image “like a fag’s burn mark” and “like the cane’s juice in the cyclops’ mouth” (verses 42 and 43), a metaphor inspired by a Greek myth used as a cannibalizing image of the colonizer exploiting the colonized, are combined to describe the intense feelings that memories of plantations and slavery in the colonized New World cause in the body of the poet.

After another breathing pause a third drum, the emblematic Sabar, appears in the form of a call, recited like a plea: “Sabar!” (verse 45). The symbolic importance of this drum for the poet is foregrounded by its repetitive presence in the following lines. This assembly of verses differs from the previous in that it invokes an addressee. The poet introduces a call and response play connecting the metaphorical drum call (“Sabar!”) with verses that expose illustrative images like “memory of broken glass” and “muscles abandoned to the cane”. The use of this image, the Sabar drum, known to be the instrument

that “griots” use during their oral poetry recitations, contributes to situating the poet’s performance close to West African oral poetry tradition. Griots⁹² are traditional West African oral storytellers, also considered oral historians (Thompson 1978/2000). For griots poetry, storytelling and oral history are interdependent.

The verse “Blue note⁹³ tattooed over the daybreak surface” (63) is emphasized by the next, “Jazz in harmony”, which marks the introduction of a different set of verses. The pronunciation of this verse forces the performer to slow down the pace (“jaaaazz, en phaaasse”). We see that Delmaire chooses rhyming words like “jazz” or “phase” because these allow him to linger in the “as” and in the word ending “zzz” to highlight the meaning conveyed by the words. Delmaire stretches out the ‘as’ and ‘z/s’ for greater effect so that the slower rhythm of these verses simulates a ‘jazz-like’ pace. This pace entails a deviation of rhythm because it contrasts with the previously energetic ‘sabar-like’ recitation. This aural point of inflection is facilitated by a musical symbol (jazz) which has intercultural origins like the poet’s. Meaningfully, the intercultural music symbol “jazz” is connected to, “in harmony with”, the communicative capacity of the poet: “my words and sentences”, depicted as “my black-butterfly tongue” (67-69).

Percussion instruments bring painful memories but when associated with “Red” (verses 77-78) they also symbolize aliveness. Drums are associated with the condition of a heart whose vigorous beatings awaken the poet and provide a powerful encouragement (“again the desire drains my veins”). The drums energize and motivate the poet for the future, making him act: “swallowing the

⁹²Originally from West Africa, the griot is the traditional bearer of a clan and as such considered an oral historian. The term has been extended to designate other African oral storytellers

⁹³This is the note that characterizes the music called blues, born out of the tragic collision of three worlds brought about by the vicious triangle of the slave trade. Blue notes are also often seen as akin to relative pitches found in traditional African work songs.

veil that blinded me" (verse 80). However, they do so in a calm and peaceful way since there are also drums, like the Djembe (verse 83), which produce a soothing effect. Djembe is a West African drum played with bare hands which means "everyone gather together in peace", and this defines the drum's purpose.

In line 90, the poet introduces the tam-tam as a last allusion to African percussion instruments. Delmaire problematizes the fetishizing connotations of an ambivalent iconic image, the tam-tam⁹⁴. This image illustrates in this poem the powerful tension that sets the radical significance of African percussion within black and European imperial history. This quintessential representation of African sound resumes and contains the existential thoughts and emotions expressed by the previous appearances of images and sound effects of drums and beats. "tam- tam⁹⁵ (s) witness" the rebirth of the poet after his painful hallucinatory episodes and the poet is washed and welcomed back to reality: "the smile of the woman I love". The tam-tam is associated with the call "Red" and precedes the last verses describing how the poet henceforth calms down ("ma folle que vacille"). However, the invigorating effect of the poet's African heritage symbolized by African drums will still provide the poet, in the French city where he lives (my pride "vole a nouveau sur la ville"), with the strong energy previously conveyed by the images portrayed in the poem by percussion instruments, blood, heart and memories. The poet's bodily way of perceiving this energy is highlighted by the verse "and my footsteps trample the ground" (99), an allegorical expression of the entire body of the poet as being a percussion instrument, beating the ground.

⁹⁴ The term is sometimes used as a blank-name for any primitive drum. It is also taken "as Afrocentric sites of authenticity" (Hill 2013: 114) or "as a site for mythologies of blackness, rhythm, and drums in the imperial imagination" (Hill 2013: 103).

⁹⁵ African percussion, which is an onomatopoeic reflection of its percussion beats. In Western musicology and ethnomusicology the trajectory of the tam-tam "stages percussion as the music of the other" (Hill 2013: 116).

3.3. Summing up the implications of the analysis for young people

The previous exploration of poems was intended to illustrate the literary strategies produced in poetry for young people by the encounters between the heritages from both sides of the French and Spanish colonial legacies, trying to acknowledge that these postcolonial experiences are “especially amenable to aesthetic expression” (Ramazani 2001:75). The Spanish poems that I selected for analysis are linked to the cultural identities of Spanish-speaking countries that are characterized by the encounter of Spanish cultural colonisation, American indigenous cultures and the emergence of a new creolized culture. This helps illustrate how an analysis of poetic responses to Spanish colonisation in the Americas can be seen as pertaining to a postcolonial debate. In the case of the French poems, I considered heritages from French ex-colonies but also the expressions of poets from territories which are still under French rule,⁹⁶ whose cultural situation entails a dialectic between Western cultural domination and the validation of a specific local culture, namely local mestizo (mixed-race) and creole (French people born in the colonies) cultures. What all these have in common, as the previous analysis allows for inferring, are some characteristics that can be schematized as follows.

□ In poems that can be approached using a postcolonial lens, indigenous, local and regional modalities of thinking about the world with regard to nature can be appreciated. Deep relationships with the environment inspired by different Pan-American or African cosmologies bring to the stage representations of landscape and connections to the land that draw on metaphors, metonymy and symbolic references to South America, Africa, and

⁹⁶ Called in France “territoires d’autre mer”

the Caribbean Sea and islands. They illustrate what the French postcolonial critics Bessière and Moura signal about studying postcolonial poetics; that they must pay attention to scenography as the legitimate inscription of a text in the world.⁹⁷

- The use of distinctive words, images, stylistic devices and sound patterns to foreground idiosyncratic understandings of social constructs and to illustrate recurrent concerns.
- The need to express a sense of cultural displacement or contrast and the longing for a distant land related to the poet's roots.
- The feelings associated with living in a liminal space of constant cultural negotiation.
- A social commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity with a specific desire to integrate different ethnic (mainly a mixed-race singularity) and cultural positions within a context marked by white male supremacy.

The value of these poems resides not in the possibilities of young audiences building, tentatively, a more or less coherent and rational account of the ideas that some poets try to expose. Rather, it lies more in apprehending, through mind and body, the texture, sound, mysteriousness and complexities of the poets' expressed contradictory feelings and experiences. A postcolonial approach emphasizes how the language of poetry, especially because of its metaphoric concentration, is well suited to expressing feelings of dislocation. According to postcolonial critic Ramazani, "dislocations of meanings, (...) are both integral to postcoloniality and the very structure of metaphor" (2001: 74). In this vein the authors of poems like *La Extranjera* or *Rouge* reserve sophisticated metaphors like the "kitchen garden" or the different drums in *Rouge* for enacting the mentioned dislocations. The interpretative opacity of

⁹⁷ "Une étude des poétiques postcoloniales doit par conséquent se concentrer sur la scénographie, inscription légitimante d'un texte dans le monde" Moura 1999: 109

such metaphors avoids the risk of assimilating the poets' accounts of pain and difficult cultural negotiations as superficial transcultural experiences.

The work of Césaire, Guillén, Mistral and Senghor is especially relevant from a postcolonial point of view. However, in both the Spanish and French cases (although in different ways), the poems from the selected poets that figure in textbooks (e.g., *la Muralla* and *Demain*) are poems that appear to deviate less from liberal multiculturalist norms than other poems by the same authors. In other words, it would only be after a close reading of the poems that an inexperienced reader could understand how some discursive and formal elements reveal characteristics that can be considered resistant to different kinds of colonial cultural domination. In this sense, the features that make the selected poems interesting for a postcolonial reading of poetry (and for an education in cultural diversity that assumes cultural difference) would need to be contextualized and made sufficiently salient so as to be easily appreciated by young audiences. Therefore, highlighting the production context of these poets and its relationship with the reception context of Spanish and French audiences, respectively, would be a key aspect of supporting a postcolonial approach to the reading of poems that the observed textbooks seem to highlight insufficiently.

In the case of verbal performances like the ones selected and analysed, the weight of sound is more overt than in the written poems that can be found in school syllabuses or anthologies like *La Extranjera* or *Jardin de France*. Listening to *Iniciacion* or *Rouge's* verses read aloud, especially in the voices of Delmaire and Pallares, young audiences can engage aurally with the poems, with what Bernstein calls "the sounding of the writing" (1998:13), giving them the best opportunity to understand the author's specific intentions in selecting the sounds of the poem. In Pallares' *Initiation* and Delmaire's *Rouge*, young audiences can empathise and engage with the authors' craft and expressed

feelings in ways that allow them to perceive the poets' selections of the most appropriate rhythmic interweavings of their own inner streams of thinking and emotions. This might help young people to reconnect with the corporal experience of poetry that seems to disappear, as children grow older.

The contemporaneity of poetry productions allows young people to frame by themselves the performed poems in contexts of production that they are familiar with. Young people can position their own experiences of reading/listening to contemporary poems into the culturally syncretic contemporary global framework they live in, which is the context in which contemporary performed poems are produced.

Contemporary performed poems⁹⁸ are particularly relevant examples that emphasize the subversive power of postcolonial poetry. They can be seen to prosodically contest the rhythms of French and Spanish official⁹⁹ verse culture. The performed poems also work as organic metaphors of cultural plasticity since they subvert the immovability of texts and the written word.

“In the oral stages the audiences
do not like fade sentences”

(Extract from *Les Poètes se Cachent pour Ecrire*¹⁰⁰ by Soleyman Diamanka)

Performed poems mirror the malleability of cultures and highlight the instability of notions of cultural value. They can help young people to focus their attention on the “creolized texture of transnational experience as it is formally and imaginatively embodied” (Ramazani 2012: 291).

⁹⁸ Like the examples that I examined more deeply (*Iniciacion* and *Rouge*).

⁹⁹ When talking about poetry for young people, when I talk about official verse culture I refer to the educational establishment.

¹⁰⁰ This poem is originally written in French as seen in Appendix 4

A postcolonial approach to poems like the ones analysed can illustrate how the deep relationships with the environment inspired by different Pan-American or African cosmologies bring to the stage representations of landscape and connections to the land that draw on metaphors, metonymy and symbolic references to South America, Africa, and the Caribbean Sea and islands. The focus of Senghor's and Delmaire's connections to landscape can be seen as a nostalgic approach that continuously contrasts urban metropolitan scenes with the natural scenery of the French colonized world. The kinds of connection to the earth or even the cosmos that are active in these poems require attention to various elements if young people are to perceive the poet's expressed connections to nature. For instance, Pallares, like Mistral's poems in their turn, highlights a neglected metaphysical feminine connection to the earth that challenges the hegemonies underlying contemporary youth experience characterized by young people's diminished encounters with the natural world.

3.4 Framing the analysis of poems in a wider international framework

The previous analysis could be put in dialogue with other initiatives that seek to work with poetry in performance and young people, and with research efforts that explore how oral forms of poetry and modes of dissemination acknowledge the contributions of diverse cultural poetry traditions.

The diverse¹⁰¹ cultural collisions between the varied cultural perspectives of different regions with a colonial past, where recent migrant communities come

¹⁰¹ "Have also transvalued and creolized these global forces to bring into expression their specific experiences of globalized locality and localized globality" (Ramazani 2012: 291).

from, collide with European cultures in differentiated and evolving ways. However, certain parallelisms can be appreciated amongst contemporary artists, not only creating varied forms of poetry in French and Spanish but also, for instance, in English. There are implications that could fruitfully be explored further and framed within an intercultural trend that supersedes the French and Spanish contexts compared in this thesis. French-speaking and Spanish-speaking contemporary poets who express themselves from different metropolitan European spaces fit into a wider map of contemporary poets with heterogeneous postcolonial conditions.

The case of school practice with British-Caribbean contemporary poetry is relevant as it allows for the kind of postcolonial approach that this research carefully evaluates and endorses, and is created under conditions similar to those framing the Spanish and French poetry examples explored here. Caribbean poetry has received some critical attention from British educational institutions. For instance, the work of poets such as Grace Nichols, John Agard, Valerie Bloom and Benjamin Zephaniah are good examples of poetry for young people that aesthetically embody the postcolonial condition, in particular linguistic and formal structures, and some of this poetry is being included in the British school curriculum. The literary expressions and the trajectories of poets currently enunciating their cultural negotiations in Western societies like the Spanish, French and British contexts share salient similarities. Poets who draw their inspiration from varied cultural heritages, including fusing poetry and other arts (e.g., coming from the intersection of singing and performing scenes) are helping to shape contemporary Western cultures.

CODA

One of the opportunities that postcolonial theories offers is to work with objects that are very different from the conventional objects that literary study has traditionally focused on, namely poetry for young people and poetry in performance. The situation of postcolonial criticisms within the limits of literary institutions (in Europe, at least) can allow for defining a different relationship between researchers and the institutions, notably with regard to questioning the literary norm, the canon and the usual intellectual analytical reading procedures. Therefore, the aim of this work with regard to the qualities of postcolonial poetry is not to defend the inclusion of any specific poems or poets in the French and Spanish school canons. It does not intend either to defend the existence or pertinence of any particular canon (e.g., a postcolonial canon) but rather to stress the interesting particular ways in which poetry enacts the articulation of cultural negotiations. Considering that the formation of literary reputations and literary processes inevitably become social since they involve “not only the perceptions and thinking of individuals but also other social and cultural artefacts” (Benton 2000:271), the following chapters are focused on discussing the conditions of existence in France and Spain of poems that can be read using a postcolonial approach and the possibilities for young people’s engagement with them.

Chapter 4. Searching for poetry in Spain and France

“The mediocrity of much contemporary children’s literature rather than being explained by the metaphysics of authorial talent, can be justified by the physics of production and distribution”

(Goldin 2016)

4.1. Investigating school poetry

In this chapter I am going to explain how I searched for poetry and what I observed from searching for and selecting poems in school and outside the school environments.

The first stage of the school poetry exploration focused on searching for poems currently in print that young people encounter in French and Spanish secondary school education. I concentrated on textbooks and anthologies being used now by children in French and Spanish schools. The first objective was to find poems included in textbooks and anthologies that were characteristic of the poetry that a contemporary adolescent in France or Spain would be likely to encounter during his or her secondary school progress. The second was to look, within the textbooks and anthologies, for poems by Spanish and French speaking poets with Latin American, Caribbean and African cultural roots trying to focus on the concurrence of particular cultural and artistic strategies that could challenge and subvert cultural Eurocentrism.

In French and Spanish secondary education (age 12-18), young people learn about poetry mainly through language and literature courses. The Spanish and French educational systems teach language and literature in the same course.

Given that it is common practice in both contexts to use syllabuses to support the teaching of these courses, I pay attention to currently published school textbooks used in Spanish and French secondary education that combine linguistic and literary education¹⁰². These books include selections of literary texts and other teaching materials. They are considered an important educational tool for both teachers and pupils.

Some supplementary text selections can complement the poetry that can be found within school syllabuses. Poetry anthologies published for school use are the most common. Either school boards or teachers propose the textbooks and the complementary materials that are used in practice. In France, textbooks often include suggestions of poetry anthologies for teachers and students who seek additional poetry material that will complement the poetry content offered in a textbook's lessons. This is not common in Spanish syllabuses.

Spanish and French educational directives for literature teaching in secondary education are not specific about which poetry texts should be taught or approaches used. Teaching artefacts supporting poetry practice in Spanish and French secondary schools include selections of poetry that are widely used by educators. These selections provide a researcher with more concrete data than official directives about how poetry is taught and selected in practice. Teaching artefacts provide us with "important clues to the forms taken by practices of teaching and learning" (Lassig 2009:1), and so the exploration of school corpora can help to build a picture of representative practice and strategies for building poetry school corpora. It can also reveal issues about the general conditions of poetry teaching in the Spanish and French contexts.

¹⁰² However, the ways in which these educational elements are intermingled or coordinated differ significantly in French and Spanish practices

4.1.1 Selecting school textbooks

For the selection of school textbooks and anthologies I tried to use a sampling strategy in which units were chosen based on how representative of the population they were (Schwandt, 2001: 232). The units of the sample are Spanish and French school textbooks and poetry anthologies currently used in the French and Spanish education systems. I selected textbooks and poetry anthologies used in schools following the instructions of the French and Spanish education systems (Appendix 1 includes some references to pertinent Spanish and French regulations).

The sample of school syllabuses is composed of one French and one Spanish textbook per year of secondary education. To obtain syllabuses used in both the French and the Spanish educational systems within a limited time frame, I used a convenience sampling strategy. I acquired a French textbook from the equivalent to UK's Year Seven on wards from two different French schools (the "Lycée Français" and the French section of a European School). Some Spanish syllabuses now being used in every secondary school year were also easily available. These Spanish syllabuses come from children attending the Spanish section of a European School. What is taught in the Spanish section of the European School (a public institution governed by the decisions of the European Union's member states) is representative of Spanish schools.¹⁰³ Only language and literature teachers who belong to the Spanish national official body of teachers (civil servants of Spanish public schools) can teach language and literature in the Spanish section of a European School¹⁰⁴. However, I took into consideration the fact that, in the French and Spanish schools where the

¹⁰³ Their teachers and the curriculum are selected from the Spanish education system. The Spanish language and literature textbooks are syllabuses currently used in the Spanish schools. The school curriculum for the Spanish language and literature course in the Spanish linguistic section of the European School follows the Spanish national official curriculum rules.

¹⁰⁴ Ref: Programa de Español Lengua I, ciclo secundario. Aprobado por el Consejo superior de 17 y 18 de mayo de 2000. Rethymon. Creta

books that were available to me are being used, the last two years share the same syllabus. I therefore had access to a total of twelve syllabuses, with six per language¹⁰⁵.

4.1.2 Looking for coincidences between textbooks and recommended anthologies

In the next phase of my research, I complemented the officially specified poetry selections with a search for official recommendations by relevant French and Spanish literary organisations. I searched for anthologies that can be seen as representative of mainstream practice because they are reviewed and endorsed by institutions frequently consulted by different agents (teachers included) who mediate between young people and literature. The aim was to find coincidences between the poetry included in school textbooks that could be read using a postcolonial approach and the poetry recommended by institutions.

To filter poems from the textbooks I paid attention to the presence of French and Spanish poems that were written by poets whose cultural backgrounds were rooted in the colonized territories of the French and Spanish colonial pasts. The identification of the poets' cultural roots was clearer in the case of poets figuring in school poetry (than in non-school poets) but it was necessary sometimes to evaluate the cases of the poets more carefully so as to justify the authors' relationships to colonial and postcolonial legacies (e.g., Neruda and Dario).

Poetry anthologies were selected from the most consulted general lists of recommended readings for young readers from selected representative bodies whose opinions have enough weight to be taken into account at a national level. Two national organizations issuing recommendations, with similar comparative weights at national level in each country, were taken into account.

¹⁰⁵ List of syllabuses in Appendix 2

In France, the national centre of literature for young people (Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse) is called La Joie par les livres (LJPL). This is a public organization that belongs to the French national library, Bibliothèque National de France (BNF), which is also the French section of the International Board on Books for Young People (French IBBY). The aims of LJPL are to select and promote “quality literature for young people” One of its main concerns is “to identify the best youth production in all forms and genres and to promote quality children's literature - Joy through books” (LJPL’s web page¹⁰⁶). In line with its mission to support reading and to promote the literary quality of texts for young people, the centre periodically publishes several guides and thematic dossiers as well as selections of reading recommendations.¹⁰⁷

In Spain,¹⁰⁸ the organization Fundación German Sanchez Ruipérez (FGSR) created the International Centre of Literature for Young People and the National Network for Reading. These independent and non-profit organisations were founded in 1981 and are supported by the Ministry of Education. FGSR promotes and supports reading activities, libraries and literacy in a broad sense, including research into new ways of reading. Unlike the French organization, which belongs to the national library, this institution does not depend on a Spanish governmental institution. However, it works closely with different public and private institutions. Like its French counterpart, FGRP periodically issues diverse lists of recommended readings

¹⁰⁶ <http://lajoieparleslivres.bnf.fr/masc/Default.asp?INSTANCE=JOIE>

¹⁰⁷ This calls itself the National Centre of Resources. The Centre publishes studies and two journals: *Revue des livres pour enfants* in printed form and the online revue *Takam Tikou*. It organizes training, conferences, meetings and studies, mainly at national level. It also offers advice on library management and mediation. LJPL cooperates, for single actions or long-term projects, with a varied array of representative organisations involved in the field of children’s literature in France. It works with partners such as libraries and librarian organizations, diverse training organizations at national and regional level, some structures of the national education system (e.g. SCEREN) and several university research groups. It also cooperates with publishing houses and miscellaneous organisations (e.g. CLIO: Conservatoire contemporaine de Littérature Orale).

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.fundaciongsr.com>

that are widely used at national and regional levels¹⁰⁹. It also provides public access to online and print resources for professionals involved in the promotion of literacy among young people¹¹⁰.

The most easily available and updated general lists of recommended readings for young readers were *Escales* from French IBBY and *Lo+ 2012* from FGSR. Within the poetry recommendations from these lists, I cross-referenced poets recommended in these lists with the poets identified in the school textbooks.



Illustration 4: General guide to French recommended readings which was taken into consideration. General guide to Spanish recommended readings which was taken into consideration

The recommendations of the French national body were enough to select interesting anthologies. The guide contained enough indications about the origins of the poems to allow poetry anthologies to be selected that were likely to feature poems interesting for this research. The recommendations of the French national body comprised enough poetry suggestions. In four of the recommended anthologies¹¹¹ included in the list interesting poems could be spotted quite clearly. The initial aim was to explore 4 or 5 anthologies per language context. By contrast, within the Spanish list called *101 Best Reads for Young Readers*, only three items were poetry recommendations and only one

¹⁰⁹ It also evaluates and constantly improves its strategies by seeking to collaborate with a large number of institutions and people through its projects.

¹¹⁰ E.g. <http://www.canallector.com>

¹¹¹ The French recommended anthologies selected figure in Appendix 3

was interesting for my research, an anthology that comprised poems by both Spanish and Latin American poets. There were not enough relevant poetry recommendations for my research purposes.

To enable the selection of more Spanish anthologies, I consulted an additional list of recommended reading for young readers focused on interculturality and issued by the same Spanish organisation. However this list excluded poetry recommendations without explanation and I had to look for additional sources. I asked for the assistance of a specialist from the FGRP, who filtered the organization's databases of reviewed and recommended readings for poetry recommendations. After consulting the recommended poetry anthologies for young readers from ages 11-18 (only 8), and consulting the indexes of those anthologies and selecting only the ones containing authors from non-European cultural heritages, I could only select three books, two of which were single-author volumes. Although these were single-author selections, I considered them useful for the cross-referencing method being applied since these were the works of the Chilean and Cuban poets Gabriela Mistral and Nicolás Guillén, whose poetry appeared in the Spanish syllabuses. Furthermore, both Guillén and Mistral also figured in the Latin American anthology that was recommended reading¹¹² for two school years according to the teachers that I spoke to, and it served well for a wide-ranging geographical distribution. The selection of anthologies (7) that was considered is detailed in Appendix 3.

¹¹² The lists of syllabuses and recommended readings that were used in this project figure in Appendices 2 and 3

4.2 Observations about the school poetry search

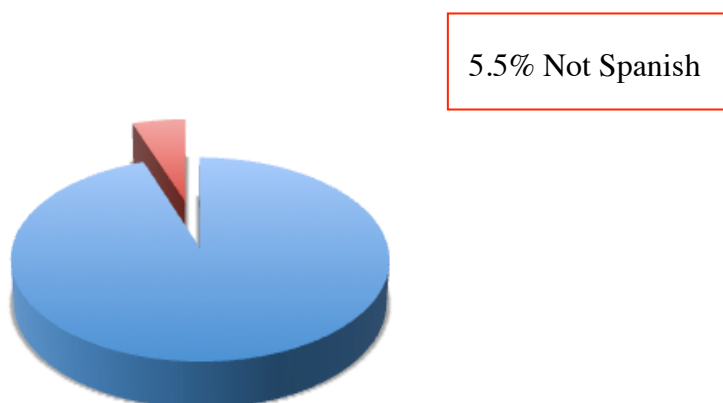
Finding poetry that could be examined using a postcolonial approach revealed important issues relating to intercultural negotiations relevant to education. These perspectives will be developed alongside the interview material in chapter 6. This information was also useful for enabling a better understanding of the Spanish and French fields of poetry for young audiences.

Comparing French and Spanish schoolbooks, poetry has a more prominent presence and seems better integrated with other literary forms of expression in the French case. For instance, while only a few modules in each observed French syllabus are focused specifically on poetry, poems appear frequently in the majority of the lessons. This does not happen in the observed Spanish textbooks, where poetry seems a quite isolated kind of literary expression.

In the twelve textbooks that I explored, poets with postcolonial backgrounds wrote fewer than 5% of the poems. Taking into account the fact that there were more than 300 poems in both syllabuses, this means that the poetry I focus on is quite poorly represented within both French and Spanish poetry available for teenagers. However, the number of poems showing connections to a postcolonial legacy in the French syllabuses (e.g., Francophone writers from Africa or the Caribbean region) is more significant than in Spain.

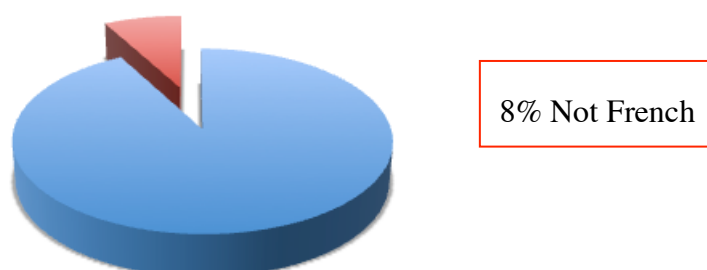
- 10 from Latin American writers out of 188 poems in Spanish textbooks

Proportion of Latin American and Spanish writers in textbooks



- 14 poems from Francophone poets from Africa or the Caribbean region (including TOM)¹¹³ out of 178 total poems in French textbooks

Proportion of African and Caribbean writers in textbooks



The number of poems showing connections to a postcolonial legacy in French syllabuses is bigger than in the Spanish sample possibly because non-European cultural heritages may receive greater recognition from those who select poetry in France but also due to socio-historical reasons related to differences between French and Spanish colonisations. The desire to articulate cultural asymmetrical relations is more common amongst non-European French speaking writers than among non-European Spanish speaking writers because the emancipation of

¹¹³ TOM are “territoire d’outre mer” We need to take into account French and Spanish different colonial pasts when looking at the presence in the lists of Spanish-speaking authors and French-speaking authors from countries with a colonial legacy

French colonized people from French colonial power is quite recent (and even still on-going), whereas the asymmetrical cultural relations between Spanish speaking cultures have been normalized for longer.

The reading of the previous pie charts and the significance of the proportions that they represent need to be taken into account into a global context. About 500 million people speak Spanish in the world. Less than 10% of this population lives in Spain (Spain's population is around 47 million people). More than 80% of Spanish speakers come from Latin America. The most important immigrant community now living in Spain comes from Latin America. With regard to the French context chart, we need to frame it within an awareness of a global community of 220 million French-speaking people of whom 44% live in Europe (mostly in France, followed by Belgium and Switzerland), 46% in Africa and 10% between North America and the Caribbean region.

Spanish textbooks currently in use show that the core aspect of poetry education during the secondary school years is the teaching of a timeline of literary movements focused on the transmission of a national Spanish cultural heritage. In contrast with this historicist approach, French textbooks reveal an intention to avoid a focus on the history of French poetry. This intention follows educational guidelines at official level¹¹⁴ in national regulations.

In the observed Spanish school poetry selections, little credit is given to non-Spanish cultural heritages. When the Spanish arts and humanities curriculum confronts the issue of an education in cultural diversity, it largely ignores the existing cultural differences between Spanish speaking cultures. Rather than giving credit to the cultural richness (but also problematic relations) that this diversity represents, it prefers to focus on the differences enacted by cultural

¹¹⁴ Refer to Appendix 1. Document about the official French recommendations for the teaching of poetry

minorities who differs the most from the Spanish norm (e.g., because they do not even speak Spanish). The little attention given to poetry from non-European traditions seems historically decontextualized in terms of the poet's rhetorical strategies and meaning. Only some verses from a few poems that articulate cultural differences are quoted as examples in lessons that focus on linguistic or stylistic devices, with no reference to their production contexts (see the example of Guillén in next page). Also, the writings included in syllabuses that express non-Eurocentric cultural heritages are likely to be those that can be assimilated within a liberal multiculturalist paradigm. The material included in Spanish teaching guides and syllabuses suggests that the few poems included in the school sample that could be read as postcolonial are approached in ways that erase cultural differences. It goes without saying that not all Latin American poets are interested in articulating the cultural variations that local differences might represent in contrast to European traditions. However, the canonical Latin American poets who are present in the explored textbooks and anthologies have done so to a great (Mistral and Guillén) or lesser extent (Dario and Neruda) during their literary careers, even if this is not highlighted in school poetry education. In two lessons, from two different syllabuses of the last years of school, poet Ruben Dario is shown as an icon of modernism and is mentioned as a touchstone in timelines of literary movements but no poems are mentioned. The visibility of Latin American poets figuring in Spanish textbooks and anthologies of worldwide canonical poet Nicaraguan Ruben Dario¹¹⁵ but also of Chilean Pablo Neruda (in one textbook and one recommended poetry book¹¹⁶) is significant because their cultural heritages are presented as being assimilated into a Spanish continuum of literary movements studied in Spanish secondary education. These poets played an important role in shaping Spanish

¹¹⁵ I did an interesting informal survey among Spanish students, who thought that Ruben Dario was a Spanish poet

¹¹⁶ *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (20 love poems and a desperate song) by Pablo Neruda

national literary movements at the beginning of the 20th century (generación del 27¹¹⁷). Despite the fact that, for Latin American modernist poets, the use of exotic images and techniques sought to highlight a characteristically American identity (Muller Berg and Mendoza 2009), the emphasis in Spanish textbooks when teaching about Neruda and Dario is not on the cultural differences that their works enact. Instead, the attention paid to the modernist trend originating in Spanish Latin America serves the purpose of foregrounding the emergence of a literary movement considered a stepping stone in the history of national Spanish literature.

I now take a look at one concrete example, which appeared both in a Spanish syllabus and in a recommended anthology: the poetry of Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén. I recognize that the manner in which his poetry is introduced to young people will arguably affect how they explore and understand the features of the poems, and position the poems with respect to larger currents, cultural tensions and ideas in one way or another. For instance, in the selected Spanish syllabus used for the last two years of school,² one short paragraph is dedicated to Guillén at the end of the book, in a section about avant-garde poetry in Latin America. However, on this occasion the description does not include any poems, instead it just mentions the author as being representative of a literary movement within a historical timeline that does not highlight how literary expression is linked to Guillén's experience of regional socio-historical circumstances (which explains his resistance to cultural domination). Guillén also appears on other occasions in two Spanish syllabuses but quite anecdotally. On one occasion, two isolated verses (but not the whole poem, which is quite short) of Guillén's *La Muralla*¹¹⁸ are used, together with verses

¹¹⁷ The Generation of 1927 was a group of poets, well studied in secondary school, that emerged in Spanish literary circles around 1927

¹¹⁸ It is worth noting that *La Muralla* is well-known by many people, although not everybody would know who its author is since the poem attained large audiences thanks to its

from other poems, to illustrate the use of rhetorical figures in a table that enumerates stylistic devices (in a syllabus for year 7). Also, the poem *Son para ninos antillanos* appears in a lesson about literary genres but no contextualisation is offered and the poem is followed by some questions for the pupils about the poem's main theme and formal aspects. The presence in a Spanish textbook of Guillén's combination of Caribbean differences with European Spanish heritage would require highlighting or explaining the difference that this fusion represents. Failing to contextualize Guillén's cultural difference within the Spanish continuum can reinforce educational practices that approach poetry as an object of national acculturation. A short introduction to an author like Guillén would be especially relevant when one of his poems appeared on a syllabus so as to take into account how the voice of the author has a distinctive personal connection with the text's ties to a colonised culture and territory, and his affiliation to the expressions of other poets like, for example, José Martí¹¹⁹.

A few examples taken from the inspection of French textbooks illustrate that the negotiation of cultural imbalances is an educational issue that visibly permeates French more than Spanish literature and language educational approaches. For instance, the name of a series of syllabuses from one of the main French publishing houses included in my sample is *Les Couleurs du Français* (*The colours of French*). It is also illustrative that, in one of the French syllabuses, one lesson is named "between two cultures" because it approaches the issue of negotiating plural identities. The abovementioned lesson contains a selection of varied

transposition into song form by popular music singers (like Chilean band Qulapajun and Spanish Ana Belén). This can be seen as an example of assimilation, a consequence of the lack of contextualization, the lack of approaches that valorize difference and put these poems within a national continuum.

² For this stage, the Spanish curriculum foresees a quick exploration of XXth-century Latin-American poetry

¹¹⁹ Author of the poem popularized in the famous song *Guantanamera* and the author of the famous essay *Nuestra America*, a touchstone of Hispanic post-colonialism (Chapter 2)

literary texts, including one poem from Leopold Sédar Senghor to illustrate how literary texts express feelings of cultural dislocation. It is not possible to see similar examples in the Spanish schoolbooks that I could access. This coincides with my perception of a general French pedagogical strategy that takes the colonial heritages and cultural tensions present in the work of the examined poets into account more fully than in the Spanish case. The Césaire poem that I eventually selected for literary analysis figures in one recommended anthology called *La Cour Couleurs. Anthologie de Poèmes contre le Racisme (Poetry Playground. Anthology of Poems against Racism)* but extracts of Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* also figure in the syllabus for the last years of school.

4.2.1 About the presence in school material of poetry in print and in other forms

Poetry included in the selections suggested by both French and Spanish recommending bodies is almost exclusively poetry that is disseminated in print form. I could observe a few exceptions but only in the French case. For instance, one interesting recommendation included in the poetry section of the French list (LJPL¹²⁰) that I used to guide my selection of anthologies was a CD with songs from French-speaking popular contemporary singers with different cultural origins. This CD features a list of readings for young people, in a section focused on cultural diversity, and the CD is listed together with other poetry books. I could not find any Spanish equivalent within the available Spanish lists of recommended readings.

I observed that the ways in which printed and non-printed poetry are treated in poetry education relates to the existence of conflicting trends in the panorama of poetry that have an important impact on educational approaches to it. While this is an aspect that international scholars have repeatedly associated with the

¹²⁰ La Joie Pour les Livres, French reading recommending organization described in previous chapter

difficulties of discussing poetry with regard to young people (Paul 2010), this thesis discusses its connection to the presence of different cultural traditions in the poetry that is made available for young people.

The representation of poetry and the limits of the poetry field (what people think poetry is, who it is for and what forms it takes) relates to what different gatekeepers select as poetry. An expert in poetry teaching and editor of one of the French textbooks (Year 10) that I considered gives the following explanation about current approaches to poetry: “there seems to be two distant extremes in contemporary poetry. On one side the poetry that is only understood by ‘connoisseurs’, and on the opposite side the poetry disseminated in the form of song” (Colmez¹²¹). It is interesting to come across the issue here because it is in a French school textbook where an editor and educationalist connects opposing trends with how flexibly or rigidly the contours of the poetry field are perceived. Colmez’s comment emphasizes the existence of opposing views, a view that poetry education should encourage a fluid representation of poetry with flexible limits and a view that seeks to preserve an ideal of poetry that is best represented by printed poetry sanctioned by opinionated gatekeepers. In my research the issue traverses all discussions and observations about poetry for young people, as Chapter 6 will describe when discussing with interviewees the forms that poetry takes when circulating outside the constraints of official discourses.

The recommendations of the French LJPL align to an intention to avoid extremes and promote a fluid representation of poetry for young people. These highlight the connections between song and poetry, especially between poetry and songs that are close to young people’s culture. In other words, the perspective of LJPL sits in opposition to a more intellectual and elitist trend that

¹²¹ In Appendix 2

understands contemporary poetry as only printed poetry accessible to connoisseurs with a certain cultivated background.

Examples of poetry in performance were absent from the French and Spanish school samples. Also, comments like Colmez's illustrate a neglect of the growing¹²² importance of poetry in performance since contemporary poetry aspiring to reach wide young audiences (and not just "connoisseurs") comprises different types of poetry in performance. However, poetry in performance has been recently but progressively receiving, if only temporarily and as a cultural fashion as some argue, some attention in school materials, mainly in France. In the newest editions of some school textbooks and some newly recommended anthologies there are some examples of performed poems from slam venues.

I could find a few references to poetry in song form in the sample of French textbooks but in the Spanish¹²³ only verses from a few songs figured as part of exercises aimed at teaching rhetorical figures. The ways in which songs figure in textbooks contrast with how canonical printed poetry¹²⁴ is positioned and studied within these. Poetry in song is not introduced as part of an effective strategy to juxtapose different poetry modes and forms. When examples of poetry in song figure in the observed Spanish syllabuses they are not in the main body of the books. For instance, a few examples of online links¹²⁵ to songs

¹²² Probably because the edition is from 2004 and performance has grown rapidly in importance in the last 10 years.

¹²³ This contrasts with a quick viewing of poetry selections in textbooks for primary education in Spain, where there is a strong emphasis on song and playground rhymes (as seen in Chapter 2).

¹²⁴ I say canonical conventional because the songs included in Spanish textbooks are often song versions of canonical texts (e.g.: Lorca).

¹²⁵ This is mainly because copyright rules and reproduction can be more difficult for songs, of course, especially if they become popular.

are proposed within the activities that can be found at the end of a few chapters/lessons¹²⁶ in one textbook.

In French textbooks I found some examples of songs in poetry lessons. In the newest editions of some French textbooks there seem to be an increasing number of song lyrics, some of which are from contemporary music popular among young people (e.g., reggae music, hip hop). I observed in the most recent editions a few examples that feature side by side with conventional written poems. Often they are socially engaged songs, and songs articulating cultural differences are common amongst these.

4.2.2 Differences in pedagogical designs

Poetry lessons or activities are framed within the study of the history of literature in the Spanish case. Activities with poems, included as examples of the work of certain emblematic poets, prioritize technical skills (e.g., lexical, rhetorical, metrical etc.). Contrasting the kind of exercises with poetry proposed to students in French and Spanish textbooks, it is possible to appreciate that in the Spanish case poetry is approached as an instrument for the apprehension of linguistic skills rather than as an expression of art, aesthetic appreciation. French textbook activities proposed after poems are varied and less technical; French poems also more often appear accompanied by representations of other artworks, mainly paintings. In France there is a more active consciousness about representing poetry as an art-form, and the inclusion of poetry activities with other arts in textbooks and anthologies is more noticeable than in the Spanish case.

In the rare cases when artworks (e.g., paintings) illustrate lessons in Spanish textbooks that contain poetry, it is because poem and painting belong to the same historical moment. In Spanish textbooks the presentation of poems make

¹²⁶ A problem is that song rights are very expensive.

it is difficult to perceive poems as art expressions. In contrast French textbooks usually promote a dialogue between artworks and poetry in the same lesson because they both try to express similar emotions or related issues as the following example illustrates:

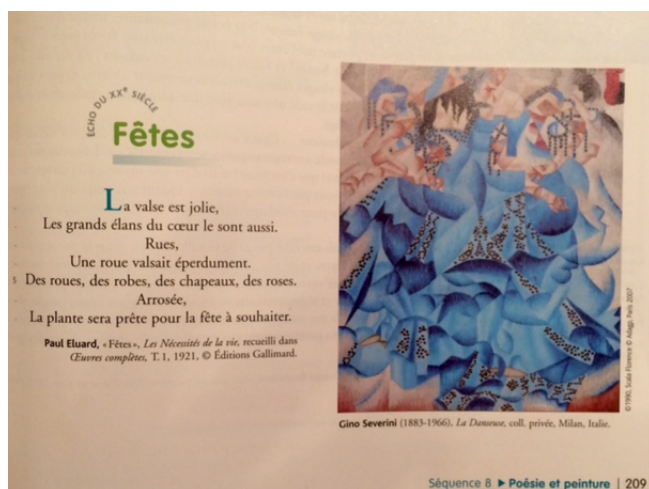


Illustration 5 Example of Paul Eluard's poem *Fêtes* placed in dialogue with the painting *La Danseuse* by Italian artist Gino Severini in a lesson's section called *Poesie et Peinture*

Another example of the intentionality of highlighting the artistic nature of literature can be seen in the names chosen for French textbooks. Whereas Spanish textbooks are simply called *Language and Literature textbook grade "N"* (e.g., *Lengua y literatura 4 ESO*) the names of the French textbooks are more artistic. For instance, the name of a series of textbooks explored in this research is illustrative: *Fleurs d'encre* (means "Ink flowers" in English), an expression coined by French poet Rimbaud to designate words.

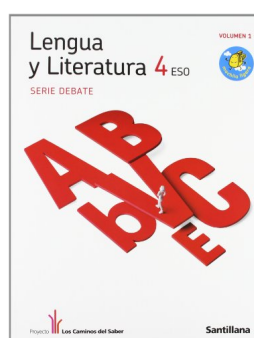


Illustration 6: French and Spanish textbook covers.

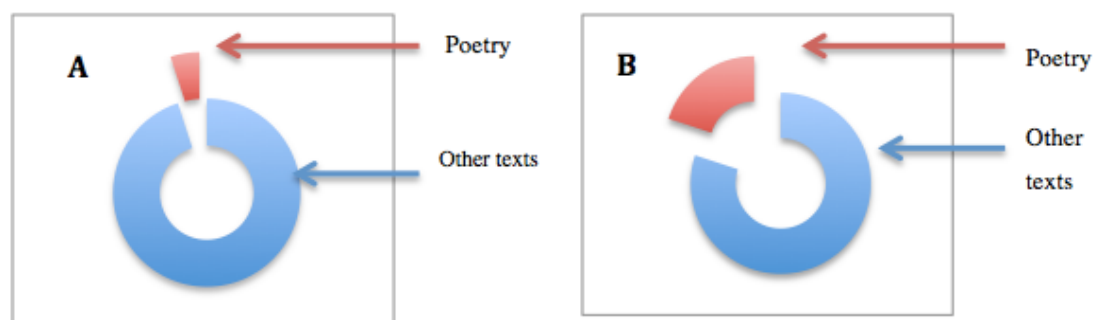
This is only an illustration of a much more active concern and holistic understanding of the role that poetry can play in the life of young people that can be observed in France as compared to Spain at all levels. The greater variety and enhanced sales of publishing houses dedicated to publishing poetry for young people in France as compared to Spain are perceptible in book fairs or by just comparing the shelves of French and Spanish bookshops. The relevance and visibility of French poetry organizations and the variety of initiatives proposed by diverse poetry venues presenting original art-proposals fusing poetry and other arts are also well-known by Spanish poetry organizations. The greater success of the slam movement in France as compared to Spain is not surprising.

Differently from what can be observed in the French case, the Spanish tendency to give little space for poetry within general lists of recommended reading adds to the presentation of poetry as disconnected from other art forms seen in syllabuses. These issues certainly contribute to isolating poetry from other literary expressions, and also neglect to make poetry more visible for young people.

4.2.3 Observations about anthologies

According to the information that I could gather from the French and Spanish organizations that I talked to, French recommended readings for young people give more weight to poetry than Spanish recommendations. An example is that the French list of recommended readings issued by LJPL that guided my selection of poems is divided into genres and a section is dedicated to poetry recommendations, including a significant number of anthologies. At least 20%

of the French 'readings' in the list are poetry recommendations. In the Spanish list, however, only 3% of the recommendations are books of poetry.



Proportion of poetry in A) Spanish and B) French recommendations for young people

The range of French poetry anthologies that pay attention to cultural diversity in the most commonly consulted list issued by the French LJPL contrast with the difficulties in finding accessible recommendations of the same kind on the Spanish side. In the poetry recommendations of French LJPL I could quite clearly identify poetry that would serve my analysis in four or five of the recommended anthologies¹²⁷. However, in the Spanish case it was difficult to find anthologies that included poems by both Spanish and Latin American poets. In the initial list that I consulted (101 best reads for young readers) I could only find one interesting anthology. In the available Spanish guides focused on 'multicultural readings' that I could access no poetry suggestions could be found. Examples are the *Guia multiculturalidad FGSRP* and the reading guide published after the 2011 IBBY thematic congress focused on cultural minorities held in Santiago de Compostela. These lists of recommended readings focusing on intercultural issues only contain fiction and picture books. To find more poetry recommendations I needed the assistance of a Spanish specialist, something that was not necessary in the French case. Although I did

¹²⁷ The selected French recommended anthologies figure in Appendix 3

not need any more recommendations to find more anthologies from the French case, I had access to one list of recommended readings issued by the same national organization, LJPL, which was dedicated exclusively to 'Francophone' texts for young readers. This list contained different texts including poetry recommendations. Comparing both contexts, whereas poetry recommendations were easily available in France it is significant that in Spain one needs to search much harder to find poetry recommendations from accredited bodies.

The names of some poetry anthologies suggested by the French recommending organization illustrate how intercultural concerns permeate the field of poetry for young people in France, while nothing similar can be perceived in the Spanish case. The information provided by poetry editors¹²⁸ helps with understanding the types of poetry that are prioritized in different contexts and how this poetry is currently being contextualized and approached. For instance, one recommended anthology is called *French is a poem that travels*. The name of another anthology is *Colour playground, poems against racism*, recommended for the first years of secondary education. While the thematic approach that the title of this anthology suggests may divert the attention away from interesting features that a postcolonial approach could highlight, the repertoire of poets and poems included in the anthology reveals an intention to juxtapose French and Francophone poetry. The concern to acknowledge non-European poetry heritages that can be perceived when exploring poetry selections included in French syllabuses can also be observed in the poetry recommended by official organizations. The same concern is not perceptible when exploring poetry selections included in Spanish syllabuses or when looking at recommended anthologies.

An exception within official recommendations that differs from the mainstream

¹²⁸ This can be applied to other kinds of "editors", like webmasters of Internet sites featuring video-recorded poetry performances

Spanish poetry selection practice is a crossover¹²⁹ anthology called *Our poetry over time*, featuring in the list of recommended readings that I used from the Spanish representative body, FGRP. While this recommended anthology keeps the conventional focus on literary timelines of Spanish poetry teaching, the approach differs in the fact that Spanish poetry (our poetry) is understood here as poetry written in Spanish from both Spain and other Spanish-speaking communities. Interestingly, in this anthology published in Spain and recommended for young audiences the presence of both Spanish and Latin-American canonical authors is quite balanced. Also, an editorial approach valuing the difference that non-European Spanish authors contribute is made explicit in the introduction: “the future and richness of *our*¹³⁰ language [Spanish] comes largely from the countries of Latin America”¹³¹ (Colinas 2009:43)¹³². This is the only case in my exploration of the samples where the cultural difference, richness and capacity of the Spanish Americas to breathe dynamism into Spanish language and literature is highlighted. With the exception of the Spanish anthology *Our poetry in time*, poetry anthologies for young people tend to reinforce what can be seen in poetry selections included in Spanish textbooks; that historical and linguistic connections between Spain and other Spanish-speaking communities are not reflected or highlighted sufficiently in the poetry that is approached in Spanish formal education. The value and particularities of Latin American cultures¹³³, which are characteristically hybrid, is acknowledged in some intellectual circles and poetry forums that are not frequented by young people.

¹²⁹ Addressing adults but also young people (and recommended for educational purposes)

¹³⁰ My emphasis

¹³¹ My translation of “En los países de Latinoamérica (..) está en buena medida el futuro y la riqueza de nuestra lengua “

¹³² Something that the mentioned French publisher tried to acknowledge in the title of the anthology: *French is a poem that travels*

¹³³ Because this is the non-European cultural heritage that young citizens living in contemporary Spain can engage with

But the Pan-American cultural idiosyncrasy is less united and has less strength than the African, whose diaspora is more united.

4.2.4 Difference between mainstream anthologies and anthologies for young people

Some differences between the practice of anthologizing French and Spanish poetry for young people and general practice (poetry for adults) in anthologizing poetry can be seen when searching for poetry that reflects different cultural heritages. In mainstream general poetry anthologies labelled 'Spanish poetry' that are published and distributed in Spain, the presence of Spanish-speaking poets from Spain and from Latin America is often quite balanced. However, in French poetry anthologies (not especially marketed for young people) distributed in France the work of French-speaking poets from non-continental France and other French-speaking countries is scarce. In this sense Spanish contemporary anthologies echo better the mature cultural affiliations and longer relationships between Spain and Spanish Latin America compared to how the existing connections between France and French colonized territories are perceptible in French poetry publishing. This might be a reasonable reflection of the fact that the Spanish population of Spain represents a much smaller minority in the global Spanish speaking community (5%) than the minority that French people represent in the Francophone world (40%). Contrasting with the Spanish case, French critics frequently denounce the idea that French mainstream poetry needs to give more relevance to Francophone productions (Labbe 2009). Largely speaking, one needs to search for specialized anthologies in France in order to find Francophone poetry.

It is striking to see how the observed situations in French and Spanish practices of anthologizing poetry are inverted when comparing the practices of anthologizing French and Spanish poetry for young people. French educational gatekeepers seem more concerned about the acknowledgment of 'Francophone' poetry than their Spanish counterparts are about acknowledging other Hispanic cultural heritages. The recommendations of French organizations are in line

with these observations.

The ways in which French education recognizes the cultural differences of Francophone poems as compared to poems by authors from continental France cannot always be seen as a “juxtaposition of competing aesthetics that encourage multiple strategies for meaning making without hierarchy” (Thomas 2007:114). As expressed by the signatories of the manifesto signed by French intellectuals in 2007, the distinction enacts an intrinsic cultural hierarchy that resonates with inherited colonialist cultural inequities. This veils the possibilities of portraying all French-speaking literary expression in equal terms.

4.2.5 How this curriculum material handles the complexity of the postcolonial debate

The contextualization and teaching support given for poems in Spanish and French textbooks reveal different understandings of cultural difference. These reproduce the complications that postcolonial debates tackle. They reflect, on the one hand, an approach to cultural difference that tends to assimilate one culture into another (e.g., Latin American poetry into the Spanish cultural continuum) and, on the other, an approach like that of the French, which differentiates between metropolitan and Francophone cultures.

The well-known postcolonial metaphor of cultural hybridism (as introduced by Homi Bhabha) receives two opposing criticisms that relate to Spanish and French educational difficulties in dealing with intercultural issues and cultural imbalances. The first criticism argues that the hybridity theory “too readily dissolves and thus depoliticizes the division between colonizer and colonized” (Ramazani 2001: 181), muffling the power differences between cultures. The second, nearly opposite, criticism is that “the hybridity model reiterates and hardens these divisions, however much it may be seen to eclipse them” (ibid).

The difficulties that both French and Spanish agencies face when dealing with intercultural issues are absorbed in different ways. However, both educational agendas about cultural diversity face challenges in tackling the contradictions that surface when issues of cultural imbalances are not explored. Failing to confront the cultural asymmetries might lead in both cases to maintaining the pre-eminence of unchallenged local (French from France and Spanish from Spain) representations of Spanish and French poetry. These would be seen as the highest standards of linguistic or poetic craft, and French and Spanish national gatekeeping institutions as the custodians of these standards, against which the rest of the Spanish and French-speaking poets should measure their poetic endeavours. This would further nurture an idea of poetry as an object of national acculturation in both contexts. Framing these educational challenges in contemporary social contexts marked by social unrest makes it clear how problematic it is to maintain such a representation of poetry.

4.3. Searching poetry from non-school contexts

“Public skepticism represents the final isolation of verse as an art form in contemporary society” (Gioia 1991)

Taking into account the fact that poetry for young readers and audiences articulating differences in cultural heritages seemed quite uncommon in Spanish and French textbooks and recommended anthologies, I also looked for poems that circulate out of the sphere of official poetry for young people. I acknowledge that, despite the centrality often accorded to school experience, other forces have roles in facilitating young people’s engagement with poetry. I concentrated on looking for poems whose forms and strategies differ from what

the main cultural gatekeepers have traditionally associated with school practice. I focused on non-written forms of poetry, taking into account the fact that non-written poems were missing in the school textbooks and anthologies that I considered. My intention was also to acknowledge that young people also learn and engage with poetry outside school through non-institutional learning settings.

There are many existing possibilities for young people to engage with poetry forms that reflect the cultural heritages of European citizens of non-European descent in out-of-school contexts. However, there is a total absence of reliable and concrete indicators ¹³⁴ that could measure young people's current engagement with contemporary poetry forms outside school or in general cultural life. Therefore, when searching for poetry through informal learning contexts, the difficulty but also the interest lies in delimiting the search for information in ways that are fruitful and illustrative for the investigation.

4.3.1 Filtering poetry available through online channels

I used parameters similar to those used when filtering school poetry: I looked for French and Spanish speaking poets from non-European cultural backgrounds. However, I searched in different locations: in performance venues and especially in online channels. Young people commonly use these because they offer the easiest access to French and Spanish speaking poets from non-European cultural backgrounds that participate in Spanish and French performance venues. I used online channels that are commonly used by young people to participate in cultural life because it is through the Internet that young people can gain the easiest access to different kinds of poetry through the many platforms and online resources with which they interact on a daily

¹³⁴ My observations and communications with people involved with poetry venues and Internet platforms made me suspicious of the reliability of quantitative indicators such as numbers of visits and 'likes' in posts on online networks and Internet video platforms.

basis. Using Internet resources takes into account my convenience as researcher (e.g., it offers the possibility of accessing multiple digital recordings of performances without the need to travel to distant geographical locations), while also serving as an acknowledgment of the learning modes that are more characteristic of the new millennium and that are used by young people to engage with cultural and social life.

I concentrated on selecting contemporary poets who are currently active and whose creations are available at present through online channels (online poetry communities, video platforms, blogs etc.). It might seem that children tend to become less enthusiastic about poetry as they grow older but the case of the spoken word as a global phenomenon is worth paying special attention to as it is growing in popularity in youth cultures. I did not focus on poetry in song but I considered that poetry in performance takes different forms, in many of which the poetry recitation takes place with musical accompaniment. Poetry performed in different venues is usually registered and the videos commonly uploaded to online global video platforms or channels like YouTube, Dailymotion or Vimeo. They are then linked to the Internet pages or online social network profiles of slam communities and to the personal online sites or online profiles of the poets. However, I could only explore a small number of existing possibilities in young people's engagement through the Internet because its vastness and openness makes any ambition to representativeness impractical.

4.3.2. Selecting organizations that helped me find poetry

A useful strategy for selecting meaningful paths to survey poetry in performance using online channels was supported by the guidance of informed agents who knew about the production of poetry through different venues and about the dissemination in these channels. During a first preliminary stage I

contacted organizers of poetry festivals and venues that were known to be popular among young people. See Appendix 5. The contacts that proved to be more helpful and comparable for my purposes were the Spanish and French federations of slam poetry. They are significant because they are active in social networks and well-informed about young people's engagement with contemporary practice. The French and Spanish slam federations can be seen as both catalysers of poetry, because they group varied associations that help poets to make their poems public, and are also sites of exchange between poets, audiences and poetry event organizers¹³⁵. The slam federations are also relevant key informants for this research because they are aware of emerging practice that is being developed to bridge school practice and young people's participation in performed poetry events.

With the help of speakers from four slam organizations (two French and two Spanish) I obtained information about some poets from non-European backgrounds who participate in Spanish and French slam events. I also identified other interesting poets whose participation in local lives is remarkable and who perform poems in different venues but not necessarily with spoken word performances. I arrived at the selection of the specific poems analysed in the previous chapter thanks mainly to the direct advice of people actively engaged in the organization of slam venues. These organizations pointed me in useful directions and led me to learn about many interesting digital recordings of performed poems, some of which were not recorded during slam venues. This was even the case for Lilian Pallares, a poet who has participated only occasionally (as opposed to Julian Delmaire who was and still is very active in the French slam scene) in slam venues in Spain but who is starting to receive credit in contemporary poetry milieus and is quite active with young audiences.

¹³⁵ Some informants from French and Spanish organizations knew each other

The performances that I filtered were poems that I could find using the channels proposed by slam organizations. In many ways, performed poems like Julian Delmaire's *Rouge* or Lilian Pallares' *Iniciacion* can be seen to challenge dominant mass culture (something that poems from Caribbean traditions being used in English school contexts have been doing for a while). Yet, does the fact that the video-recorded versions of poems like *Iniciacion* or *Rouge* are made available through online platforms and supported by communities of slam poetry lovers make *Iniciacion* or *Rouge* spoken word? Even if these poets might have performed versions of these specific poems in a slam session, would that make the poems spoken word? For whom and where? Again, limits and definitions are far from clear. The point is, does this really matter? What seems to be relevant is that contemporary poetry expressions articulating the negotiation of cultural imbalances take varied forms and use different performed poetry venues that are accessible and welcoming to young audiences. These poems can be seen as resisting attempts at labelling or compartmentalizing in poetry typologies.

Given the rejection that hip hop or rap lyrics, engaged with by young people spontaneously or at least out of adult control, provoke in some cultural and educational gatekeepers, I paid particular attention to poems that would "recognize [the] alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, (but at the same time) which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture" (Williams 2005: 39). For this reason, the poems that I retained for analysis especially illustrate how contemporary poets (including the authors of poems shown in the literary analysis) who might be becoming established poets, expressing themselves from different metropolitan European spaces, come from the intersection of singing and performing scenes in urban cultures.

The authors of these poems are poets of mixed descent who started writing song lyrics or performed in slam sessions (and often both). Pallares, Delmaire and Diamanka are poets who started their creative journeys writing rap lyrics and spoken word poetry but progressed towards an alternative but yet “more tolerated (poetry) within a particular effective and dominant culture” (ibid). This is to show that some poetry that circulates outside institutionalized spheres but still keeps some elements of young people’s cultural influences (e.g., Delmaire’s recitation style) could be in a better position to stretch the dominant representation of poetry and to be incorporated, if only temporarily, in school practice under certain conditions.

4.4 Observations about surveying poetry from the out-of-school context

Searching for and selecting poetry in online channels with the help of event organizers helped me understand how poetry is being heard and read by young people and what forms it takes within young people’s cultural lives outside official education. Some of the most successful poetry (and proxy-poetry forms, as some would say) engaging young people out of the controlled environment of school education is hybrid in form and cultural influence, and comes from popular youth culture. Some popular forms of poetry are as relevant for youths as playground rhymes are for younger children. As happens with younger children, the most successful poetry expressions among adolescents are those that give prominence to aural and oral features which can be found more abundantly within the boundaries between song and poetry or between song and spoken word. Following the advice of organizations of slam

events, spoken word as well as rap or hip hop lyrics were easily encountered forms. The blurred limits between poetry and song and poetry and spoken word need to be accounted for. I acknowledge that hip hop and rap lyrics are at present amongst the most successful lyric forms among young people, both Spanish and French. It might be impossible to measure what proportion of rap and hip hop lyrics reflects the negotiation of cultural tensions but in this survey I can observe that this is often the case for Spanish and French rap. On the online social networks and channels (e.g., Facebook, YouTube) that were explored I observed a trend that is totally opposed to the dominant Spanish school approach to poetry, which tends to erase (if only by neglect) cultural imbalances and assimilate difference. In both the Spanish and the French cases it is easy to find successful verses that follow a hip hop or rap style circulating through online communities. These are focused on an exaltation of cultural differences in ways that exaggerate pride in indigenous origins and defend particularities of, for example, an Andean identity, in quite strident ways and often with poor craft artistry. Also, it is interesting to see the way in which some young people decide to position themselves when engaging with these creations, mirroring antagonistic positions between cultures in what seems a fashionable method of presenting their distinctive identities¹³⁶. Contemporary popular cultural products can be associated to modern mass culture, as standardized. However, while using these channels to select samples of poems articulating the negotiation of cultural asymmetries, I observed that poetry aspiring to attract large audiences also includes a huge array of diverse creations that seek to subvert the dominant culture rather than to become part of it.

¹³⁶ As a researcher who has spent hours navigating social networks where Spanish and French young people operate, I was not surprised to find young people active in social networks where poems are posted and commented on by young people, whose nicknames proudly highlight their Andean cultural affiliations: e.g. Guarani kid profile in Facebook



Illustration 7: Advertisement of an event hosting rap and poetry performances simultaneously

To some extent, it can be said that the explosion of verse in popular culture that has been studied by scholars in the American context (Sommers-Willet: 2009¹³⁷) is already permeating global communication channels and that young people's engagement with these forms escapes adult control, making young people more comfortable with their choices and happy about themselves. In the same way that "the best recent children's poetry is not written just for children or about children, but should aspire to be in the playground with children" (Styles 2009:215), good contemporary poetry for older children aspires to be in places where young people meet, and in their iPods, smartphones and tablets in the form of video or audio files, podcasts etc. For contemporary poetry aspiring to reach large audiences, the new media are important means of distribution, in the same way as radio and newspapers were relevant when poetry featured daily in general interest magazines and radio afternoon readings in some Western countries (Spauling 1999).

137 In her work, Sommers-Willet highlights the fact that the performance of poetry "in live and recorded media", together with "expressions of identity, particularly of race and class have facilitated an explosion of verse in (American) popular culture" (2009: 6).

Scant professional poetry expertise is involved in filtering and disseminating poetry when it comes to young people engaging with poetry without the intervention of adult mediation. This explains the absence of cultural and aesthetic consensus among cultural and educational gatekeepers. In my process of surveying poetry I identified a trend of outraged claims about cultural and social asymmetries articulated through often poorly crafted expressions. Despite the advantages that spontaneous engagement with poetry forms can accrue for young people, there is a consequence that results from quite vociferous expression (sometimes affiliated to rap or hip hop) and being so visible (and their authors seeking so much notoriety). This is a rejection of adults mediating between poetry and young people. This impedes progress in discussing ways to grasp interesting energies enacted by contemporary poetry forms that are close to youth culture. My requests for the assistance of different agents involved in the field while surveying poetry outside the school context made it clear that people involved in poetry education have grown suspicious about poets using the same channels of distribution or that have some characteristics in common with strident rhyming popular expressions. Unfortunately, this seems to veil and impede attention being paid to interesting poetry circulating in informal contexts.

The case of poems emerging or disseminated thanks to the support of slam communities and networks and performing artists is worth noting, since these poems are made available for young people and educators thanks to different venues, and their dissemination is supported by varied online resources. Emerging educational approaches considering that “the formal education provision is becoming a small part of the range of learning opportunities” (Broadfoot 2000:369) are more prone to supporting the development of pedagogical bridges between both realms (the school provision and other learning opportunities). These educational approaches could help to create

better conditions for the recognition of the poetry that this research focuses on. Poems performed in slam scenes are only an example of these. As a global phenomenon, the potentiality of a postcolonial perspective in poetry performed in slam venues is realized in quite explicit and visible ways. However, people from slam organizations reported that sometimes, although not often, poets on Spanish poetry slam stages articulate their cultural differences or express feelings and circumstances derived from cultural dislocation. A speaker from the Spanish slam federation told me that in slam events those who take the microphone talk about varied issues, many times about social injustices or political affairs. “It is also normal that some poets should express concerns about feeling culturally displaced because there are many people in this situation”. In France, a film created in 2012, *Le Slam Ce Qui Nous Brûle* (*Slam, What Burns Us*), testifies to a more significant presence in French slam scenes of poets expressing the negotiation of different cultural identities in French slam scenes than is the case in Spanish slam venues. The presentation of the film describes slam as “giving young artists the possibility of being heard and of expressing oneself thanks to a mode of expression that draws at the same time from literature, poetry, theatre, song and rap”.



Illustration 8. Documentary about the slam movement in France

In fact, the majority of the poets who appear in the documentary could be seen as postcolonial poets in the sense I deploy. This description of French slam coincides with an observation by specialist in spoken word poetry Susan Sommers-Willet about slam poetry in America: “a commitment to plurality and

diversity is one of the touchstones of Slam Poetry” (2009:6). The speakers from French slam federations I talked to reported that the presence of postcolonial voices is not as relevant as is portrayed in the mentioned documentary. However, I observed that it is easier to find performances articulating post-colonial conditions in video-recorded performances from slam scenes in France than in Spain. Based on the suggestions made by slam organizers I had to listen to and watch many more performances in Spain than in France to be able to find poems that were interesting for this research.

The vitality of the slam movement in France and the lively participation of French young people in slam venues seems much more noticeable than in Spain, where slam venues started more recently and attract smaller audiences. There are more slam events in France, and more longer-lasting slam organizations that have developed more solid structures and connections with other cultural agencies. Poetry events and festivals organized in France are more numerous as well as more popular and more frequented by young people than in Spain. French slam poetry organizations report that slam poetry has experienced a growing boom in the past 10 years and slam events are now the most common poetry event for young audiences. Also, in France publishing houses specializing in the young public have edited slam anthologies. However, the slam movement is growing in importance in Spain too, something that can be seen in the creation of new organizations in the past two years in different parts of Spain. French educational attempts to give credit to young people’s interest in poetry in performance can be noticed in the recent publication of some anthologies of French slam poetry.

Also, the film documentary mentioned earlier has been mainly distributed for educational purposes in France and some teaching material has been developed to support lessons using this film. In France, slam contests at regional and

national levels, initially launched by French slam federations, have permeated the school domain, and school poetry slam contests have become a regular event. According to the French slam federation I talked to, this has contributed to making spoken word very popular among young people. Thus, French poetry slam contests and pedagogical guides using slam can be seen as cultural actions that are currently spontaneously bridging young people's modes of poetry engagement and school poetry education. These contests are also very popular in 'Territoires d'ultramer'. Despite the fact that there is no similar slam movement in schools in Spain, Spanish slam federations have started working with some secondary schools and speakers from Spanish slam organizations are aware of current school practice.

4.5. Summary of the chapter

Comparing French and Spanish school educational material, poetry has a more prominent presence in the French case. Poetry for young readers and audiences articulating differences in cultural heritages are both uncommon in Spanish and French classrooms but the case is more salient in Spain. In the observed Spanish and French school poetry selections, less credit is given respectively to non-Spanish cultural heritages than to non-French cultural heritages. Also the negotiation of cultural imbalances is an educational issue that visibly permeates more French than Spanish literature and language educational approaches. Both French and Spanish educational agendas have difficulties when dealing with intercultural issues, but cultural difference is perceived differently and these difficulties are absorbed in different ways.

Both educational systems largely ignore the fact that non-printed forms of poetry are the most relevant forms of poetry for cultural heritages that are increasingly interacting with the European dominant poetry tradition taught in school. I observed that non-written poems are generally missing in school poetry education but in France there is a growing educational interest in poetry in performance.

Different forms of poetry in performance are now popular in youth cultures. In poetry in performance the incidence of poetry expressing its affiliation to French and Spanish speaking non-European heritages is perceptible although more in France than in Spain. My survey of the field also reveals that there is more cultural and educational support for young people's engagement with poetry in performance in France than in Spain.

Chapter 5. Explaining the methods used to gather information through interviews

“Increasingly, however, publishers of children’s books are trying to make previously silent voices audible. With each new voice, maybe, we will all be able to look tentatively towards a more tolerant future.”
(Paul 2009: 98)

While surveying and analysing poetry for young people I obtained some information about social ideas and behaviours that inform the current selection and availability of poetry. This kind of information was complemented with information from interviews. These were carried out with representative agents involved in the production and dissemination of poetry for young people.

5.1 The selection of categories of informed experts

Different agents, including writers, publishers, poetry venue organizers, librarians, educators and policy makers, are involved in the production, dissemination and mediation of poetry for young people. In their own ways all these agents have a share in cultural or educational gatekeeping roles. Their decisions are shaped by their beliefs about what poetry for young readers should look like and be useful for. The modes of engagement and educational agendas which they prioritize dictate in great measure the type of poetry that is selected for publication and dissemination. My understanding of gatekeeping roles is in line with scholars who, in studying the processes of constructing literary canons, contest the role of cultural gatekeepers as a homogeneous category. For instance, American scholar Alain Golding, analysing the process of canonization in American poetry (2009), realizes the difficulties in

determining which cultural mechanisms, or which particular confluence of factors (literary, cultural, economic etc.), promote certain works and poets whilst not others.

Through conducting interviews with key informants I aimed to check individual but relevant perspectives on which priorities and concerns guide decisions about the selection and publication of poetry. I also sought to collect informed opinions about the relationship between modes of engagement that are prioritized by young people in different learning contexts and poetry forms that articulate the negotiation of different cultural heritages and identities. My selection of informants acknowledges the mentioned difficulties and in particular how cultural gatekeeping roles intersect with educational functions in the domain of literature for young people.

I chose the interviewees by taking into consideration their relevance to the research questions. I intended to cover the field of poetry for young people, including in the sample of interviewees different kinds of agents who influence the selection of poetry texts and educational practices but only those as different from each other as possible, so as to disclose the range of variation of the sample (Patton 2002). To enable coherent comparisons between the Spanish and French contexts, the sampling and development of interviews with key informants needed to take place under similar conditions. Within each country I selected informants from analogous categories, trying to choose ten key informants whose opinions were equally relevant in both Spain and France in relation to the process of selecting and disseminating poetry for young readers in general. However, I also took into account the point of view of people who I anticipated would have a particular interest in intercultural issues (e.g., point 5 below). I describe hereafter the categories of people influencing text selection and educational practices taken into account:

- General advisory bodies in the field of literature for young people, which issue lists of readings and recommendations available for reader (young people or families) and specially taken into account by librarians and educators.
- Publishers of school material who produce textbooks, school anthologies and educational guidelines for teachers and pupils.
- Publishers of poetry selections that seek to stretch the limits of the field by publishing alternative poetry selections.
- Poetry societies or organizations specializing in poetry training.
- Relevant agents, practitioners or mediators whose opinions show a direct concern with the acknowledgment of culturally hybrid artistic expression .

Given that the focus of this research is on poetry that challenges dominant practice, my sample of participants necessarily does not include the most conservative positions in French and Spanish poetry for young people because these are not interested in new research about poetry education. Therefore the selected informants speak from representative positions that could provide the means of challenging dominant practice and poetry representations. The interviewees participating in this research can be seen as agents of social and cultural change.

5.2 Selecting participants

Previous informal communications with several organizers of poetry events, authors and even national organizations issuing recommended lists were useful starting points for selecting one French and one Spanish interviewee from each of the planned categories. Additionally, my presence at two book fairs (Paris

and Bologna) and poetry events in Spain and France allowed me to address directly individuals from relevant organizations and publishing houses who I could not have accessed easily by just sending emails or making telephone calls. In particular, networking during book fairs allowed me to meet the directors of some big publishing houses in person and to introduce my research interest briefly so that I could contact them or informed editors from their publishing houses later. Similarly, I obtained the consent of an important interviewee when I talked at the Paris book fair to people from IBBY France, who gave me the contact details of their director. She in her turn introduced me to a specific speaker for the interviews.

The attitude of all the informants who participated in the interviews was extremely positive. People who, despite their busy agendas, agree to participate in a project that investigates progress in poetry for young people are individuals who value poetry and young people's responses, and feel particularly concerned about and interested in my project. Yet, a logical consequence of my attempts to acknowledge different categories of informed people was that not all interviewees were equally knowledgeable or engaged at the same level, with the same perspective on central issues. Within a comparative perspective there are also different degrees of engagement by actors within different contexts. Comparing the French and Spanish interviewees, the quality of the information obtained from most categories seemed unbalanced, as French responses were usually more complete and better informed. Again, as happened when looking for poetry recommendations, to obtain similar kinds of panoramic views of the fields of poetry for young people in Spain and France I had to compensate for the abovementioned imbalances. To complement the information given by the Spanish interviewees and bring it up to the same level as their French counterparts, I resorted to more than one Spanish informant per category in a

few cases, and even turned to secondary sources referred to by these informants.

The actual participants¹³⁸

Based on the kinds of variations that I aimed for, these were the actual participants whose consenting participation I counted on.

- General advisory bodies

I interviewed one speaker/director each from two equally representative national bodies, one in France (interviewee 1F) and one in Spain (interviewee 1S). They represent the opinions of recognized organizations who produce lists of recommended readings for young people that are consulted by people mediating between poetry and young people (schools, libraries, reading organizations etc.). The specialized knowledge of interviewee 1F about dominant practices helped me validate and complement my own observations while looking at mainstream poetry trends. However interviewee 1S seemed only interested in fiction and I had to select a second interviewee in the Spanish case who had more knowledge and interest in poetry.

- School selections

Publishers of texts for young people who specialize in school textbooks are considered here defining cultural institutions and so they constitute another category of key informants. I interviewed editors from two of the biggest publishing houses producing books that are used in schools all around France

¹³⁸ They were treated anonymously because it was stipulated in the design of the research (see Appendix 2 for ethics in the registration report that preceded this thesis). However, my interviewees generally did not think that their anonymity was necessary. In fact, individual identity may not be so crucial if the key requirement of the study is that participants have 'informed' knowledge of a specific area. A defence of data would depend more on displaying a participant's knowledge of the substantive issues of research than giving (or hiding) proof of personal identity (Mann & Steward 2000).

and Spain¹³⁹. Interviewee 2F comes from a French publishing house and interviewee 2S from an equivalent in Spain. In the French case the interviewees were two women who work together on the selection of texts for school syllabuses. In Spain I interviewed the editor in charge of selecting literary texts and didactic material for the secondary school in the publishing house she worked for.

- Alternative selections

As often happens in Western countries, some publishing houses specialize in offering alternatives to mainstream practice. I interviewed one informant per context from publishing houses operating in France and Spain that edit poetry anthologies (interviewees 3F and 3S). The two interviewees were the directors of small publishing houses who were particularly interested in alternative voices. In the Spanish case I interviewed an anthologist and also used answers from one interview with another editor.

- Poetry training

People with expertise in working on teacher-training programmes in France and Spain, specializing in literature and with up-to-date knowledge of dominant school practices (both ideal and actual) and pedagogies, constituted another category. The initial idea was to interview two more individuals, who would be well-informed about practices of mediation in non-school contexts. What actually happened was that I found informants in both contexts who were not only experts in school practices but had knowledge of how young people engage with poetry in different learning contexts. They were well-informed about the types of practices developed by mediators working in communities, libraries or festivals. The kind of information that I obtained during these interviews was reinforced by information collected in more informal

¹³⁹ The Spanish publishing house issues different versions for different autonomic communities.

communications with poetry event organizers (see previous chapter). Interviewee 4S is the director of a dynamic Spanish university research group specializing in poetry for adolescents. This research group has been involved for many years in training programmes for teachers but also conducts different sorts of empirical work with poetry and teenagers. Interviewee 4F is the director of a well-known national organization specializing in developing all sorts of poetry activities and training at national level in both the school context and other environments.

- Postcolonial affiliation

To obtain a maximum range of variation with respect to the perspectives covered by interviewees 1, 2 and 4 I also aimed to take into account the standpoints of people in the field of poetry for young people who would presumably differ from mainstream opinion. This will be people, from cultural organizations with personal ties to African, Latin American or Caribbean heritages. Their differential standpoint makes them directly concerned with acknowledging alternative cultural backgrounds.

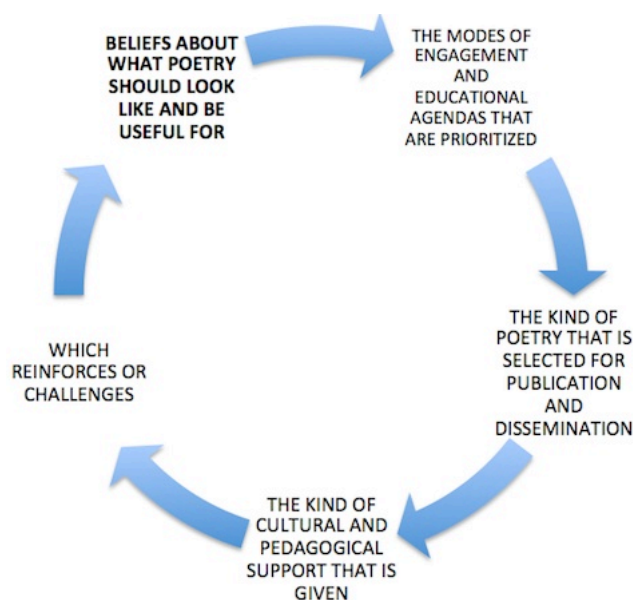
Often, people involved in the organization of poetry venues and events are poets themselves. In the French case I had the chance to access a French poet who has personal connections to Africa and “Ultra-mer” territories (interviewee 5F), is involved in the organization of poetry slams and has been conducting workshops for young people in both local communities and schools for years. In the Spanish case, I first conducted two tentative short interviews with a poet of Andean descent who is actively engaged in the organization of local literary events in Madrid and a poet of Afro-Andean roots but their knowledge of a young audiences turned out to be scarce. On the third attempt I found an interviewee well-informed about young audiences. She participates often in school events but also in poetry events in Spanish local communities frequented by young people.

Out of the previously mentioned informed agents, two were particularly interested in and prepared to discuss prospective practice with poetry that articulates cultural differences. They were interviewees 3S and 5F. Apart from participating in the first set of interviews, these participants also discussed an additional set of issues having to do with the development of prospective practice with postcolonial poetry. This is explored in the last chapter.

5.3 The interview guide

The design

Guided semi-structured interviews are useful for studies that look to construct subjective theories, as is the case here. Subjective theories are understood here as the interviewee's complex stock of knowledge about the topic under study (Flick 2007).



Picture 9: Understanding subjective knowledge about poetry

An interview containing both open-ended and structured questions permitted in-depth inquiry into complex interrelated ideas (about the location of culture, educational priorities, poetry and childhood) while helping me to keep some level of stability in certain variables. This helps with comparative analysis of the two cases, Spanish and French.

Following Ray Pawson's advice (1996), I built an interview guide around the major questions and objectives that led this research. The interview process started by summarising the focus of the research to the interviewees, characterized briefly as an interest in the intersection between a so-called global educational agenda in cultural diversity and the selection of poetry texts and approaches for young people. According to Pawson, introductory explanations try to construct a good methodological foundation for understanding, controlling and developing the negotiations between researcher and interviewee. Given that varied issues about poetry education and young people were going to be dealt with, the first explanations served to establish a thread-line for the interviewee around the issue of cultural difference in French and Spanish poetry for young people.

The interview plan used three steps suggested by Flick (2007), as follows.

1- Open general questions about the interviewee's opinions on issues like the presence of poetry in young people's lives, the cultural variety of children's intellectual diets with particular reference to poetry, and what the interviewee considered to be the main objectives in poetry selections for young readers.

2- Then I continued by trying to pose hypothesis-directed questions that originated from my theoretical presuppositions and sought to obtain more direct answers to my research question: "to what extent is the poetry that articulates cultural difference represented within the French and Spanish

contemporary poetry that is available for young people?" For example, I asked varied questions to find out whether the interviewees thought that poetry reflecting varied cultural heritages had enough visibility in school education, and if they thought that it circulated more or less freely in the "many new forms of learning opportunity that characterize the third millennium" (Broadfoot 2000:357).

3- Lastly, I prepared several alternative versions of probing questions that I had at hand but which needed to be redefined according to the answers that the interviewees were giving as the interview advanced. Taking into consideration the interviewee's collaborative attitude towards my research, an active and "confrontational" (Flick 2007) interviewing approach stands in contrast to empathetic and consensus-seeking questions. The approach is called confrontational because this kind of approach "can bring the conflict and power dimensions of the interview conversation into focus" (Brinkmann and Kvale 2008:158). Probing questions give the interviewee a more active role because the position of the interviewer comes into the open and the subjects can challenge the interviewer's assumptions, leading to "a more equal power balance of the interview interaction" (ibid).

The questions that I used are in Appendix 6 (in Spanish and French and translated into English)

5.4 Interesting observations remarked upon during the process of selecting participants

Many scholars interested in literature for young people, realizing the relative academic inattention that the study of poetry for young people suffers, have

argued that a reason for this neglect is the existence of opposing approaches (Hollindale and Hannhan 2000). These issues became clear while selecting key informants and poetry samples. Importantly, during the observation of a few events it became manifest how the existence of conflicting paradigms intersects with the issue of how cultural difference is present in the poetry made available for young people. Interviewed French editors mentioned this relationship because it has a special incidence in the poetry education of young people. The observation of textbooks, anthologies and poetry available through other channels also allows reflection on the existence of a trend that tries to challenge a conventional representation of poetry practice and another trend that tries to maintain it.

When analysing qualitative data to describe a social process, an excellent tool for helping the researcher understand data that has been collected through observation is watching how participants interact. Attendance at some exhibitions (Paris and Bologna book fairs) to help with finding interviewees for this research facilitated the observation of interesting interactions between different actors involved in the production and dissemination of poetry. The best examples can be drawn from the Paris book fair (2014), where incidents could be witnessed that reflected the relationship between the acknowledgement of cultural difference in poetry and the existence of opposing trends in the field of poetry.

Each year the Paris book fair emphasises the literary production of one “invited country”. In the spring of 2014 the invited country was Argentina. On one occasion two female Argentinian poets interacting with French cultural gatekeepers (decision makers in the French field of poetry) during a round table discussion named “Does poetry have any use?” (“la poésie sert-elle a quelque-chose?”), showed a positive attitude towards both the opportunities for

disseminating and accessing poetry that online channels allow and a flexible understanding of the idea of poetry itself that was not shared by other participants.

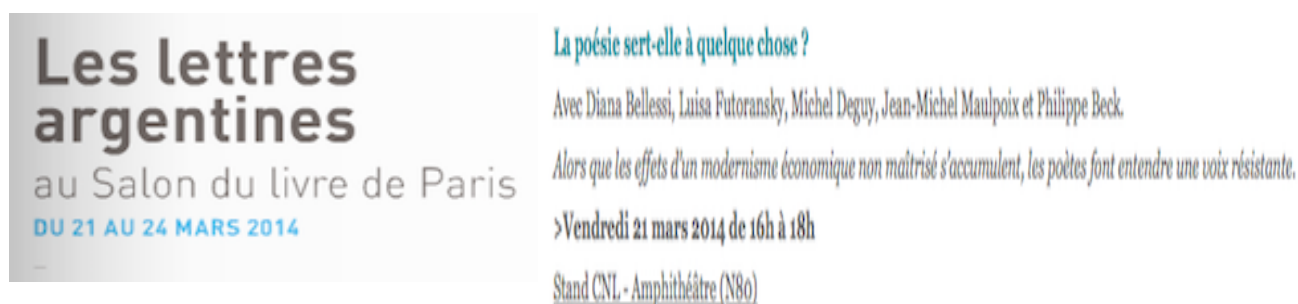


Illustration 10. Picture of part of the programme from the Paris book fair

The invited speakers (French and Argentinian) were placed around a table on a podium surrounded by a small amphitheatre. The audience in the amphitheatre were mainly teenagers and a few teachers, probably on a school visit. The interactions between the different agents involved in the discussion evolved into a heated debate that illustrated rival paradigms and did not end well. There were two sides holding conflicting ideas and attitudes about the kind of poetry that should be prioritized in cultural and pedagogical practice. On opposing sides stood, on the one hand, two female Argentinian poets (Luisa Futoransky and Diana Bellessi), and on the other hand poets and editors representing the French intelligentsia. The interventions of the French representatives illustrated the persistence of quite elitist positions, which also happened to be quite Eurocentric. One of the things that a French intervener commented on was the “impoverishment of the French contemporary scene”. He associated this impoverishment with the spread of Internet modes of dissemination that “make people think that anyone can be a poet these days”. An association between a reactionary intellectual strand of poetry and a nationalistic approach could be seen in the French case. By the end of the debate

the positions of both the Argentinian and French people were revealed to be quite opposed, and at one point one of the Argentinian poets even asked the French participants: "Have you realised that you have not even mentioned a single non-French author up to now? Not even considering that we are also participating in this round table and we are not French?".

Talking about the inspiration that, as mentioned by Diana Bellessi, the two Argentinian poets draw from local differences, one of the French participants in the round table discussion was disdainful making the comment: "at the end of the day what is Argentina more than a kind of province of Europe?". Little consideration was shown towards Latin American folklore, which was talked about in pejorative terms (exotically and colourfully popular but not really literary), and this offended the invited Argentinian poets¹⁴⁰. One of them stood up from the table to leave the venue. This precipitated the end of the discussion. Significantly, at that moment most of the young people who were sitting in the audience stood up and left in disapproval. Minutes later the round table was over. The general perception of the cultural difference between Spanish-European "serious" poetry traditions and "less serious" popular folkloric Latin American inspiration is related to opposing trends, which could be described here, only as shorthand, as high-brow printed culture versus low-brow mixed popular culture.

Although the position of the French delegates at this round table seemed reactionary in contrast with other important speakers also participating in the Paris fair's events (see Eric Orsena/Oxmo Puccino later) they echo a 'high-brow' representation of poetry that is traditionally transmitted in formal education, perceived as the "highest expression of a cultural heritage, the fruits of a

¹⁴⁰ Whose work is inspired on regional folkloric traditions from their motherlands, as they highlighted during their presentations in the roundtable

national history, that need to be preserved and transmitted to young people” (interviewee 2S).

Another event at the same book fair allowed me to witness a reverse situation. It was an interesting dialogue¹⁴¹ between a French academic, Eric Orsena, who is a renowned writer and member of the French Academy, and a popular Malian-French hip hop singer (Oxmo Puccino) who had just published a book of poetry made out of tweeted verses.

The French academic, whose opinion carries an acknowledged high literary reputation, celebrated in a public literary event the role of this hip hop singer and verse composer, especially successful among young people, as making an important contribution to the poetry field. He called for attention to be paid to the Malian-French artist as a valuable “culture knitter”. On this occasion, not only did the agent representing a recognized gatekeeping role (Orsena) celebrate the poetic contributions of Oxmo Puccino as a “cultural knitter” but his acknowledgement also showed openness to challenging conventional Eurocentric representations of poetry.

The development of alternative poetry approaches can best influence cultural practice and poetry pedagogies if the characteristics of poetry that alternative approaches highlight are progressively considered as valuable and validated by gatekeepers valued by public opinion. Examples like the one mentioned about Eric Orsena validating the poetry of hip hop singer Oxmo Puccino go in these direction. Alain Golding, studying the progression of American poetry travelling from “outlaw to classic” (2009) asserts that the potentiality for subverting normative attitudes towards poetry is bigger when the subversion is done within the limits of the field.

¹⁴¹ In a presentation over a podium surrounded by an audience of people attending the fair



Illustration 11: Eric Orsena and Oxmo Puccino

The standpoints of the Argentinian poets, mentioned before, are flexible and in the line with the exchanges between Eric Orsena and Oxmo Puccino. They seem to echo José Martí's ideas about Eurocentric cultural hegemony in Latin American states, defending the idea that "there isn't a battle between civilization and an underdeveloped state but between a false erudition and nature¹⁴²" (Martí, 1891).

5.5 Practical information and chart about the development of interviews

The interviewees participated in semi-structured interviews lasting around 30-45 minutes. They were in-depth interviews. I introduce here a chart of the selected interviewees to help the reader understand better the quotes from the interviewees that are introduced in the next chapter.

¹⁴² My translation of "No hay batalla entre la civilización y la barbarie, sino entre la falsa erudición y la naturaleza"

Shorthand (number) + Spanish (S) French (F)	Category	How was the interview arranged	When did the interview took place	Other information
1 F	National body issuing reading recommendations for the youth	Salon du Livre Paris March 2014	May 2014	The speaker is particularly interested in poetry for young people
1 Sa 1 Sb	National body issuing reading recommendations for the youth	Sending emails and making phone calls	May and September	1Sa issues reading recommendations. 1 Sb comes from an institution with less national weight than 1 Sa's but his expertise in poetry is well-known. He complemented the information from interview with 1 Sa
2 F	Educational publishing house. Publishes textbooks & mainstream literature for young people (also poetry anthologies)	Salon du Livre Paris March 2014	May	Two people. They are the authors of textbooks. They have also experience as University teachers and school inspectors

2 S	Educational publishing house. Publishes textbooks & mainstream literature for young people (also poetry anthologies)	Bologna Children's books fair	May	One person with years of experience in publishing educational material. Not the author but the editor compiling material for the edition of textbooks
3 F	Publishing house offering alternative selections	Bologna Children's books fair	May	The speaker was a teacher, a poet and the founder of a the publishing house interested in cultural variety
3 S	Publishing house offering alternative selections	Bologna Children's books fair	May	The founder of a small but innovative publishing house that is set as an example of good practice by Spanish scholars
4 F	National organization with experience and knowledge about poetry promotion and training for educators	Paris Salon du Livre	June	An expert with years of experience as director of the organization, editor, poet and teacher of teachers.

4 S	National organization with experience and knowledge about poetry promotion and training for educators	By email	June	Speaker from a University centre conducting poetry projects for adolescents at National level. She also trains teachers.
5F	Speaker from cultural organizations with ties to African or Caribbean heritages	Slam event in France	June and September	Poet with African and Caribbean roots. Also organizes slam events and poetry workshops for young people both in and outside school.
5S	Cultural organizations, with personal ties to African, Latin American or Caribbean heritages	Poetry event in Spain	June and October	Caribbean poet doing poetry activities for young people mainly in non-school contexts.

The interviews were preceded by online conversations. They were mostly face-to-face discussions taking place in Paris, Madrid and Barcelona. I also made use of online video conversations for an additional interview with two of the interviewees.

Appendix 6 figures an interview transcript and the questions.

Chapter 6: Opinions and reflections from interviews

*“The content of the notion of poetry is unstable and it varies over time”
(Jakobson 1973:123)*

6.1 Introduction

The first sections (6.2 to 6.4) of this chapter present a summary of general patterns that emerge from the interviews. Here some quotes are selected from the interviews to illustrate how agents confirmed or complemented what could be learned about the presence and availability of poetry in school education and in informal learning settings. Appendix 6 figures an interview transcript.

Later sections (6.5 to 6.7) in this chapter are dedicated to exploring how interviewees, when reflecting on ideas that inform the current selection, dissemination and teaching of poetry for young people, also engaged in unstructured considerations about intermingled educational and cultural issues.

Finally, to conclude the chapter, a synopsis highlights continuities and discontinuities between the French and Spanish scenarios of poetry for young people with regard to the research questions.

6.2. How the interviews confirmed previous observations about cultural diversity in school poetry

“Mankind has opted for monoculture: it is in the process of creating a mass civilization, as does beetroot if grown in the masse.” (Strauss 1955/2012:38)

The point of departure for asking French and Spanish informants about the priorities for the current selection and dissemination of poetry for young people was to talk about the variety of available poetry in the school context. Both Spanish and French interviewees unanimously signalled stagnation and little diversity in form and cultural influence in school poetry corpora ¹⁴³.

The pattern of general priorities that emerges in the Spanish interviews is that transmitting the national heritage following a literary timeline is the most important issue in the selection of poetry for secondary education. Here, poetry is mainly considered as an object of national acculturation, and poems are often used for the realization of syntactic and linguistic exercises. To the question “Is cultural diversity taken into account as an objective of poetry education, and is it considered in the selection of texts for young readers?” 100% of Spanish interviewees gave negative answers. All Spanish interviewees answered that the priority of poetry education in secondary school is the transmission of the national heritage. For Spanish interviewees there was no cultural diversity in the poetry available in Spanish school education, and the only Spanish interviewee (4S) who could give an example of how cultural diversity is taken into account described a case of poetry practice with young people that cannot be considered mainstream. This consisted of an alternative practice, organized by a Spanish research team specializing in poetry for young people, which developed with groups of students from diverse cultural backgrounds in a

¹⁴³ Despite the existence of recommendations in both contexts highlighting the importance of offering varied poetry to young people (mentioned in Chapter 2).

specific learning environment, in what Spanish educational regulations have called welcome classes; i.e. groups formed by recently arrived students from other countries¹⁴⁴.

The pattern that emerges from French interviews about general priorities is less clear. The heritage model in Spanish education is more pervasive than in France, but it is also evident in the French curriculum. However, teaching poetry from other cultural heritages has recently been incorporated as an educational objective. Nonetheless, the responses of French interviewees to the question “Is cultural diversity taken into account as an objective of poetry education, and is it considered in the selection of texts for young readers?” were not clear and seemed divided. The ambiguous answers of French interviewees reflected an existing lack of consensus about the perception of multicultural education in France. In a different vein, French agents involved in poetry and young people reveal that engaging young people in enjoying and valuing poetry as an art expression is also a salient educational objective in its own right in French secondary school education. This issue, valuing poetry as an art, is something that Spanish interviewees particularly signal as a quite neglected aspect of Spanish secondary literary education. The following excerpts from interviews, first Spanish and later French, illustrate the patterns referred to:

6.2.1 The Spanish interviewees

6.2.1.1a The interviewed expert 1Sa, talking from a national recommending organization, specializes in recommending books for young people but is not a specialist in poetry. Of all the interviewees, he seemed the least interested in poetry, and in fact he did not initially understand why I was researching the relationship between poetry and cultural imbalances. He was surprised that I

¹⁴⁴ For more information see ref to CIDE 2005 (Centro de investigación y documentación educativa) in Appendix 1.

was not focusing on prose and asked why poetry. For this interviewee it was harder to find the presence of different cultural heritages in poetry than in fiction, and he did not seem to agree about or realize the possibilities of poetry in expressing cultural divergences.

6.2.1.1b Interviewee 1Sb, whose opinion I sought to complement the small amount of information about the school context provided by interviewee 1Sa, explained that in Spain the poetry that is taught in secondary education is poetry by national poets. He thinks that much work needs to be done to extend the study of poetry for young people from different cultural heritages that share the Spanish language (he is particularly interested in the issue)¹⁴⁵. He commented on a new optional¹⁴⁶ course in Spanish secondary school. The course 'Universal literature' is now an option for students who choose to focus on Humanities but schools can decide not to offer it if they think there will not be enough students interested in it. According to this interviewee the recent creation of this course is a cautious answer to trying to integrate education in cultural diversity with literary education. Anthologies of varied texts have been recently published to support this course. Considering that universalism is precisely one of the categories critiqued by postcolonialists as carrying an unacknowledged freight of Western assumptions, it is meaningful that the label 'universal' is used without any further explanation. His understanding of universalism and its relationship with the encouragement of cultural diversity was not clear as it does not seem clear in the school curriculum. According to one of the mentioned anthologies, the selected texts for the course Universal literature aim to represent "the best of each culture, the best of a universal heritage"(Appendix 3). However, interviewee 1Sb explained that until now no

¹⁴⁵ He commented that his centre had issued a call for proposals for research that pay attention to exploring links between Latin-American and Spanish children's poetry but there are few resources to fund these initiatives.

¹⁴⁶ (not part of the general curriculum)

debate has been developed about what is understood by the universal heritage that this course refers to.

6.2.1.2 The interviewed Spanish mainstream editor of textbooks 2S

recognized that “it is true that education in cultural diversity is a cross-curricular area in the Spanish official curriculum and that we editors try to take this into account when we work on the creation of new textbooks” (...) but “this issue is generally side-lined in literary education, especially in poetry”. She explained that this is reflected in the selection of content for textbooks: “I recognize that we are not paying attention to cultural diversity when selecting poetry for secondary education (...) we have other priorities and little time”. This interviewee also acknowledged: “we probably need to dedicate more time to this issue (...), well and to poetry education in general”.

6.2.1.3 Interviewee 3S, like the rest of Spanish interviewees, confirmed that Spanish secondary school stresses the “national poetry culture”, and only those particularly interested in the optional course on Universal literature can opt to access non-Spanish poetry. This interviewee said that “more and more small publishing houses create alternative books which are focused on poetry”. He explained that the objective of alternatives is neither the perpetuation nor the transmission of any particular poetry heritage but rather “to offer the pleasure of enjoying good poetry”. According to him in these books of poetry “the cultural origins of the authors are of little relevance”, but they allow young people to have access to varied Hispanic heritages and not only from the Iberian Spanish cultural past. He commented, however, that these books are rarely read in school and that “it is true that in Spain these poetry anthologies are either for children or for adults and adolescents are supposed to read the adult anthologies”. He recognized that there are few youth options like there are in France and that anthologies focus on printed poetry. He also complained about big publishing houses, arguing that they have sufficient weight to make

an impact on the poetry education of young people but prefer to sit in conformist positions. He complained that big Spanish Catholic publishing houses could have done much more in recent decades to change “the monotony of poetry corpora for young people, which suffers from the lack of engagement of poetry editors”.

6.2.1.4 Spanish interviewee 4S has knowledge of school practice coming from the standpoint of someone who has been leading teacher training programmes for many years and is involved in empirical research with young people and poetry. This interviewee explained that “literature here is taught as the history of literature and it is understood mainly as the history of literature from national Spanish authors (...) Poetry education is still quite focused on canonical national poetry from the past, not even local contemporary is well-represented, so thinking about paying attention to poetry from other cultures is unimaginable”.

6.2.1.5 The perception of interviewee 5S, who is occasionally involved in poetry workshops in schools but is mainly active in non-learning settings, was that “the way in which poetry is taught in school conveys a very conservative view of poetry (...) and, apart from a few exceptions, it is difficult to find poets who are not Spanish”. According to this interviewee, teachers who she talks to complain that pupils find poetry boring. “In fact, if you take a look at the poetry that is taught in schools you see it is exactly the same in one school after another and probably what you find now is exactly the same as what you could find 20 years ago or probably even in Franco’s time”. As this interviewee often works with teachers she realized that “some teachers are quite creative and try to be innovative but they have little time and many limitations so they end up always working with the same material: the same or very similar anthologies, with the same poems and poets”. This interviewee mentioned that young

people who are naturally attracted by lyric expressions are logically forced to find what could be more appealing and interesting for them outside the school.

6.2.2 The French interviewees

The opinions of French interviewees about how cultural diversity is taken into account in school education are less homogeneous than in the Spanish case.

6.2.2.1 The director of the French national organization (1F) talked with the authority of someone who has been following the progress of the production and distribution of French poetry for young people for a lifetime. She explained that the field of poetry for young people has progressed significantly in France in the last two decades but "in the production of poetry for young people the stability of texts within time is still very striking (...) I am talking about school". She expressed a vivid concern¹⁴⁷ about static school poetry corpora. She explained that well-known French poems and poets build a well-established norm that has not changed much over time because of a lack of progress in school poetry selections. According to this interviewee poetry articulating cultural variations that differ from this long established norm therefore has "little chance of being used in school poetry practice".

6.2.2.2 The editors from one of the biggest publishing houses in France (2F) signalled that, when making selections for new textbooks, they are now taking into consideration recent official recommendations to open the French school poetry corpus up in the interest of building a more culturally diverse canon. "In our latest editions we have tried to echo the latest trend, inspired by French official instructions, to try to open up to more culturally diverse selections, and we also include international poetry in our selections". To illustrate the ways in

¹⁴⁷ "What happens essentially is that the same French poets appear over and over ... it is a bit despairing", "Hum, hum [moves her head with disapproval gestures], school poetry is static up to a point...to a point".

which these editors tried to echo a more internationally inclusive practice of poetry selection within textbooks, the French editors mentioned some choices that they included in one of their most recently edited textbooks. These are a mix of examples of poems translated into French from other languages and poems by non-metropolitan French authors¹⁴⁸. Interestingly, these editors mentioned at the same time, in the same continuum, as examples of poems that they include in their anthologies, a couple of song lyrics, a performance and a few conventional poems by both French and non-French artists. Thus, “there is a poem from [Nâzim] Hikmet, one from [Yannis] Ritsos, one from [Pablo] Neruda... there is also a song from Jean Ferrat [singer, songwriter and poet] for example... and there is Senghor, Césaire (...) not bad in the end”.

6.2.2.3 Interviewee 3F, who had been a teacher for years before becoming an editor of poetry for young people, explained clearly: “French school poetry has always been primarily Eurocentric”. Indeed, this interviewee was especially concerned with this issue as he explained that it was precisely to challenge this situation and articulate his concern to bring all French-speaking poets to the same level that he created a poetry anthology for young people named *French is a poem that travels*. He referred to this anthology¹⁴⁹ to illustrate the urge, that according to him is not being properly taken into account, to portray French poetry as not only being written in French and from France. This interviewee sees himself as working against the flow and said that many more efforts need to be made in this direction.

6.2.2.4 Interviewee 4F complained: “French school practice tends to be static and to reflect only a long-established canon and thus has difficulties in

¹⁴⁸ Considering that cultural diversity is mainly seen as national versus foreign, it is interesting that these interviewees mentioned Martinique poets as examples of poets being different from dominant French national ones.

¹⁴⁹ Coincidentally, one of the French anthologies comprised recommended reading lists that I selected to filter poems used in school.

reflecting current cultural aspects of young people like the cultural syncretism we are talking about". However, he also signalled the decrease in weight of school poetry in the poetry diets of French young people due to the progression that the field of poetry for young people in France has seen since the 1980s. This has happened thanks to the development and engagement of intermediary actors such as libraries and cultural organizations. He mentioned specifically that the widespread participation of schools in the poetry initiatives supported by *Le Printemps de Poètes* "has opened many possibilities in all senses" and this has enabled an important revitalization of the poetry field for young people, which is now more permeable to current cultural dynamics.

6.2.2.5 Interviewee 5F, who is more directly concerned about postcolonial positions because of his cultural roots and works periodically doing poetry workshops in schools, commented: "until now, in French schools students had hardly any access to foreign poetry". His perception was that things do not seem to have changed much since his own adolescence. This interviewee paid special attention to the fact that "even Francophone poets are not very present in the school corpus these days". He added that when these poets and poetry are studied in school "they are not presented as belonging to the same poetry spectrum, they are set apart from the French¹⁵⁰ poets (...)".

6.2.3 Reflections on the previous quotes

The interviews revealed a common denominator amongst Spanish and French interviewees in that the cultural diversity of school poetry was seen as something that needs to be improved. However, French agents involved in school education have started to develop different attempts to incorporate some poetry selection practices and approaches that try to reflect the current hybridization of French students' cultural contexts. The responses of both

¹⁵⁰ He is referring to the fact that in some BAC exams they study a few Negritude poems. Negritude is a specific kind of Francophone poetry.

French and Spanish interviewees, though, reflected the fact that agents involved in school poetry often think about diverse cultural heritages in terms of “poésie française et poésie étrangère, poesia española y poesía extranjera” [national poetry versus foreign poetry]. Several interviewees stressed that the universality of poetry’s subjectivity implies erasing hierarchies among poetry from different cultural heritages: “an appropriate poetry education shows that all poetry talks the same universal language” (interviewee 4F). However, the frequent understanding of cultural diversity as a polarization between national versus foreign poetry seemed to stand in contradiction to an educational trend that stresses a common universal poetry heritage. This is expanded on later (Section 6.5).

The understanding of cultural diversity among French and Spanish agents in the school context is unclear. Their answers reveal that the presence of any non-national poets in school poetry selections leads people involved in poetry for young people to label these selections as “multicultural”. Anthologies including a few poems from non-national poets in a selection composed predominantly of poems by national poets are considered multicultural. However, anthologies built exclusively out of non-national poems (e.g., *Anthologie de la Poesie Africaine*) are also considered culturally diverse or multicultural.

The poetry that is made available for young people through school education seems to resist the idea that transnational cultural expression could increasingly comprise outstanding national traditions from the literary centre stage. With regard to hierarchical positions between national and non-national poetry, in the Spanish case the answer of interviewee 4S, “thinking about paying attention to poetry from other cultures is unimaginable”, is particularly illustrative given the position of the interviewee as head of teaching programmes. This is because the comment implies that increasing young people’s exposure to more

culturally diverse poetry corpora is only imaginable after reinforcing the diversity of national¹⁵¹ poetry.

It is also interesting to frame these issues within an international comparative perspective since the polarized understanding of cultural diversity that some interviews reveal also seems common in other Western educational teaching practice contexts. Anglophone scholars Obied, Dymoke, Hugues, Rosowsky and Barrs have recently discussed similar issues in *Making Poetry Matter: International Research on Poetry Pedagogy* (2013). For instance, Andrei Rosowsky, reflecting about poetry and intercultural issues in the British context, comments with dismay on the experience of hearing people in staff rooms referring to “cultural poems”. According to him, by labelling some poems as “cultural” these teachers reinforce “the essentializing and stereotypical perspectives such a choice of materials was, with the best intentions, designed to resist” (2013: 182). Some answers from French and Spanish interviewees allow to extract reflections about Spanish and French monolithic national cultural hegemonies that go in the same direction as Rosowsky comments: “this is the direct result of accepting consciously or not, the essentializing and monolingual hegemony that often prevails in our established school system, at least in the United Kingdom” (ibid).

In talking about the Spanish case a reflection on the perception in Spanish poetry education of cultural diversity in poetry from Latin American authors is pertinent. Interviewee 3S reveals in his comments a belief that cultural trends highlighting the appreciation of the cultural difference, as compared to Spanish national canonical poetry, of Latin American poetry do not permeate the school context. He confirms that in the historical evolution of Spanish poetry production: “Spanish school poetry ignores everything but Latin American

¹⁵¹ Including Spanish poetry from specific regions.

modernist influence”, and comments that “for instance, at the turn of the millennium, there was a trendy interest in Spain in the production of Latin American writers”. However, this temporal trend only hit the cultural environment of interested intellectuals and did not permeate school practice because school poetry “only takes care of poetry that stays in the canon for a long time”.

For Spanish interviewees, who answered that there is no cultural diversity in the Spanish corpora, the customary presence of a few modernist Latin American poets, which is essentially reduced to Ruben Dario and Pablo Neruda, is completely assimilated into the continuum of Spanish school poetry. The contributions of these poets are not acknowledged as differing culturally from Spanish poets from Spain. It is not that Spanish interviewees ignore the origins of Ruben Dario and Pablo Neruda¹⁵² but that the cultural particularities of these authors’ poetry are either unnoticed or absorbed into the national norm. This coincides with observations of sample textbooks and anthologies. Indeed, the affiliation and closeness of Dario’s or Neruda’s poetry to “la poesía española del siglo XX” [Spanish 20th century canonical poetry], as it is presented in textbooks and school anthologies, makes their poetry appear no different¹⁵³ from the conventional representation of poetry that persists in Spanish school education. This leaves no space for valuing the characteristic idiosyncrasies of varied Latin American poetry.

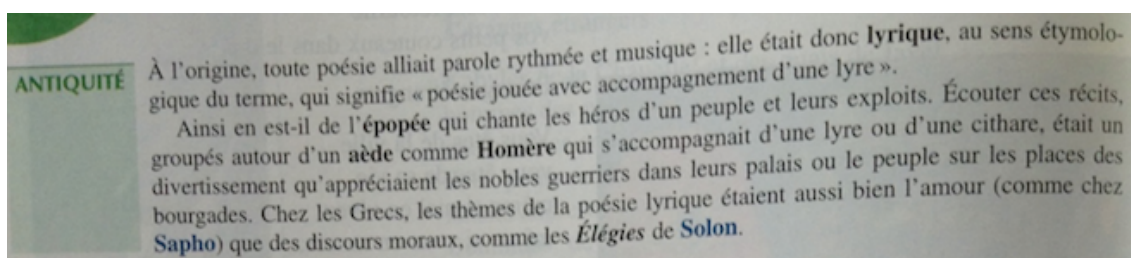
Conversations about school poetry and cultural difference with interviewees showed hints of consciousness about the fact that changes in the field of poetry for young people need to start at the level of poetry representation (what is poetry and who is it for?). Interviewees (like 3S when talking about Latin

¹⁵² Unsurprisingly, many Spanish students assume that Ruben Dario is a Spanish poet, and are surprised by the fact that he was Nicaraguan.

¹⁵³ Despite the fact that scholars specializing in Latin-American modernism highlight the uniqueness of their exoticism and nativism (Müller Bergh and Mendoza 2009)

American heritages or interviewee 2F) acknowledge that the different degrees to which non-European cultural heritages are given credit can be perceived in how the idea of poetry is understood in school textbooks and anthologies.

Frequent comments from interviewees suggest that, in order to grasp the difference enacted by poetry from non-European traditions, it might be necessary to consider that the cultural difference of, for instance, Latin American, Caribbean or African poetry is first and foremost articulated at the level of the conceptualization of poetry (Galice and Leroyer 2011). This implies acknowledging that poetry from non-European traditions has prioritized multiple forms of production and dissemination (which cannot be easily separated from music and performance) over time that deviate from the norm of European traditional practice and representation of poetry maintained by school education. Spanish interviewee 2S comments on the fact that combining the presence in a textbook of printed poetry with song lyrics might be an appropriate method of thinking about poetry in more different ways, and should be used to illustrate the variations between poetry traditions. Also, the Eurocentric understanding of poetry that French interviewee 3F complains about is in line with the poetry selection practice that I observed in the textbooks and anthologies that I explored. Also the kind of commentary included in one lesson in a French textbook describing poetry's evolution from the Greco-Roman 'antiquity' to our days, illustrates how in French traditional practice a quite Eurocentric representation of poetry is dominant.



There are differences between contexts. The answers from Spanish interviewees confirm that poetry texts and pedagogical strategies that support young people's engagement with poetry in Spain do not pay attention to cultural variations from diverse heritages. However, French interviewees report that French agents involved in school education have started to develop different attempts to incorporate some selection practices and approaches that try to reflect the current hybridization of French students' cultural contexts. The examples that interviewees 2F give when they narrate their attempts to include more culturally diverse poetry in their teaching materials¹⁵⁴ illustrate how French editors to some extent gradually try to include poems and activities aiming to challenge a conventional and static representation of poetry practice. In this sense, French interviewee 2Fa shows how they have done this in a specific textbook, through suggesting song lyrics. Pointing to the last edition of a textbook opened on the table around which the interview took place, she explained that: "See, despite the difficulties¹⁵⁵ in including contemporary songs, we could keep (..) Jacques Brèle's *La Quete* and we have Simsemilia's [a ska/reggae music group from Grenoble formed in 1990 with components from different cultural backgrounds focused on cultural and musical syncretism, socially engaged] *Debout les Yeux Ouverts*. However, French interviewee 2F also explains that editors of schoolbooks usually need to introduce any attempt to subvert a dominant static representation of poetry carefully because they still need to recognize the more conventional trend. This involves maintaining unchanged a certain stability in the well-established canonical corpus. These editors state that "textbooks are there both to help teachers and pupils" and so they need to acknowledge teachers' general preference for conventional

¹⁵⁴ They mix different forms and cultural origins in the example

¹⁵⁵ They mention the fact that the introduction of contemporary songs in textbooks is expensive because of the author's rights; that the need to pay something does not happen with older poetry

practice and understandings of poetry. Concerns about the representation of poetry appear more explicitly and recurrently when talking about poetry that circulates outside the school context.

6.3. How the interviews confirmed observations about other learning settings

“A heterogeneous collection of poetry would allow for new progressive understandings of the world, new reading strategies, new ways of thinking.”
(Thomas 2007: 114)

The interviews with participants, which started by talking about educational priorities and cultural diversity in poetry for young people, moved to paying attention to the ways in which Spanish and French poetry articulating cultural difference is made available outside the school context. Following the second step indicated in the interview guide, the interviewees were asked if poetry reflecting varied cultural traditions circulated more freely and was more available in informal learning contexts than in the school context. In fact, interviewees only seemed to understand fully what I meant when I talked about cultural difference when thinking about poetry articulating varied and sometimes colliding cultural identities. In the case of Spanish interviewees this issue emerged only when talking about poetry circulating through varied channels other than the school context. Both Spanish and French interviewees unanimously agreed that different forms of poetry easily accessible for young people express the need of authors to negotiate unclear cultural identities. The capacity of poetry to articulate cultural difference emerged easily when talking about varied contemporary syncretic modes of expression circulating through informal settings. This part of the interview triggered a discussion of intermingled issues that call for reflection. Some of these issues complicated, and in some ways deviated from, what this section is interested in highlighting,

and for this reason they are dealt with in later sections (6.6-6.8).

6.3.1 The Spanish interviewees

6.3.1.1 For Interviewee 1Sb, “What happens in the cultural lives of young people is completely different to what happens in school”. This interviewee particularly emphasised that in certain Spanish urban localities “where the presence of immigrant communities is especially relevant there are now very active cultural movements associated with varied art expression”. The interviewee further pointed out that “In these areas cultural syncretic poetry thrives; it is what they call urban poetry”.

6.3.1.2 The Spanish editor of mainstream school textbooks poetry 2S recognized the existence of a “big distance between the poetry present in schoolbooks (...) which is very national and the culture that young people engage with (...) through music (...) or attending different cultural events in public life (...) [where] varied influences from diverse cultural backgrounds now coexist and intermingle”.

6.3.1.3 Interviewee 3S agreed that young people do engage with culturally hybrid creations that “can sometimes be called poetry” but commented that young people’s preferences rarely permeate the level of adult decision making because of a lack of cultural and aesthetic consensus.

6.3.1.4 Interviewee 4S commented on difficulties experienced in trying to find printed poems from different cultural influences in Spanish for a workshop with a group of teenagers from different cultural minorities. She highlighted, however, that “thanks to Internet communication different forms of poetry circulate easily among young people (...) some of which reflect the current existing cultural variety”. This interviewee also talked about the role of music lyrics as being the form that echoes cultural syncretism in more visible ways:

"You know young people have always been very interested in song lyrics (...), and it is normal that young people's music reflects this [cultural hybridism] (...). The expression of cultural difference is typical of our multicultural societies". She also said "we see this in slam venues too" but then pointed out that in Spain the audiences who participate in slam venues are more often university students than secondary school students and that, in any case, the attendance of young people at poetry events is not widespread at a national level¹⁵⁶.

6.3.1.5 Spanish interviewee 5S, who conducts interactive poetry workshops with young people in local communities, explained that her experience in some local communities is especially syncretic. She showed much interest in the collaborative spirit created in some urban multicultural communities. She explained that today's young people tend to be attracted by syncretic cultural productions fusing the contributions of different artists, of different art forms and different cultural people. She insisted on the fact that "they, [adolescents] interacting in contemporary urban spaces, engage continuously and vividly with poetry through rap and song, also creating tweets¹⁵⁷ or drawing verses in graffiti etc."

6.3.2 The French interviewees

6.3.2.1 In the same vein, **French interviewee 1F** explained: "Culturally hybrid poetry comes mainly from the 'chants' of urban cultures (...) there are cultural practices that have developed around urban cultures (..) and suddenly, since it comes from them [she is referring to poetry emerging from young people's

¹⁵⁶ She sets the example of Catalonia, where many poetry in performance events take place in local communities, and explains that this is the case in most of Spain. In any case, she explains that this is seen more as a folkloric issue and that there is no real connection between these practices and poetry education in Catalonia either.

¹⁵⁷ Informal word to describe a [Twitter](#) update to answer Twitter's "What are you doing?" question. A tweet is basically whatever you type into the Web box to answer that question, using 140 characters or less. People tweet personal messages, random thoughts, links or anything that fits in the character requirement.

culture], it is triggering a return to poetry (..) What is interesting is that this renaissance is not coming in conventional ways at all". This interviewee highlighted that "there is a return of popular modes of expression that are now quite widespread, in which young people from mixed cultural heritages participate actively (...) it is from these modes of expression that young people from non-French cultural backgrounds express themselves (...) probably the descendants of migrant communities and even people from Ultramar [French but from non-metropolitan France] are the youth who identify less with the kind of 'distant poetry' that still governs school. There are now many spontaneous expressions of varied types thriving all around (...) yes like slam but not only, not only (...) Importantly there is also the case of many young singers in France (...) young singers who, if we really pay attention and listen well to them, what we really find are singers of a text". In the French tradition there exists a lyric tradition called "chanson à texte" (song of/with a text). It is a kind of popular song whose authors vindicate the literary quality of their texts. Some authors of this kind of lyrical form are recognized as poets. The "chanteurs d'un texte" (singers of a text) are often known by their social and political engagement. The concept was spread in France during the second half of the twentieth century. This interviewee was therefore referring to song lyrics, which for her could be attributed with a certain literary quality and are engaged with intercultural social issues.

6.3.2.2 Interviewees 2F said that they are trying, as editors of school poetry, to bridge young people's engagement in contemporary culture with the content being taught in secondary education. They mentioned that, in the elaboration of the latest editions of school syllabuses, they included texts and activities that tried to follow the lead of current cultural movements. An example they referred to was the inclusion of a song from a French reggae group, which is

distinctively syncretic, in the last edition of syllabuses for 16/17 year old students, in a section talking about poetry.

6.3.2.3 Interviewee 3F also mentioned that he had an interest “in cultural practices like slam events where there is a special reflection of cultural syncretism and also in rap and all that (...) but in general terms most of what is out there is quite poor and uninteresting”.

6.3.2.4 Interviewee 4F, in agreement with interviewee 3F, manifested an interest in contemporary youth culture and its affiliations to poetry. “You see, I have even prefaced the book of a rap singer and slammer (...) and there are some good things in there but most of the time this is not poetry at all”. He acknowledged the encounter between different cultural traditions in some of these forms but he also expressed concern about the fact that “people are using rap and spoken word to fight young people’s resistance to poetry”. For him, these were mainly “attempts to sugar-coat poetry but poetry does not need to be sugar-coated (...) not for the sake of cultural diversity nor for the sake of anything else (...) there is the risk of understanding all rap or spoken word as poetry (...) is quite misleading” (...) You can see (...) I disagree with those who think that young people are already getting poetry with rap, I say no! Absolutely not, because young people need real poetry, it is vital for their education! (...) and good poetry talks to everybody, not only connoisseurs, because it talks at the level of the human conscience”.

6.3.2.5 Interviewee 5F, like 5S, works with French and Spanish youth in different environments, and particularly emphasised the contrast between young people’s resistance to poetry in school with the fact that, as interviewee 2S puts it, “they do engage strongly and vividly with rap and song, also creating tweets, drawing verses in graffiti etc. (...) and they are attracted to poetry in performance [sound]”. Interviewee 5F, when asked about

contemporary expressions related to young people which can be seen as especially culturally hybrid, first thought about song lyrics: “Young people don’t engage with poetry, at least not in the sense understood in school. But other forms which are closer to music yes, of course, abundantly”. He explained that when he conducts poetry workshops “I ask young people, and I ask all the time about what poetry they read, and you know almost 80% of young people listen to rap, read the lyrics, download them(...) modify or invent verses sharing them on their social networks profiles etc.”. He talked about this because he believes that being culturally displaced is a constant theme in French rap lyrics. “We see cultural blending more often and more overtly expressed in rap than in poetry, strictly speaking”. He also explained, knowing slam events very well because he has been personally involved in slam sessions both as a poet and as a venue organizer, that “logically, in slam scenes of areas where many cultural heritages coexist, we see more poets articulating the kinds of feelings and concerns linked to that”. According to this interviewee, “contemporary French-speaking people from non-metropolitan French backgrounds don’t express themselves in the same ways as French poets have always done”. In our conversation, this interviewee was interested in highlighting the role of the mediator or teacher when talking about poetry for young people because he said that it “is fine if they (adolescents) don’t go on their own towards a book of poetry”, as “this does not mean that they are not agreeably surprised when they listen to a poetry recitation”.

6.3.3 Reflections on the previous quotes

The quotes included in the previous section confirm that most French and Spanish interviewees, when asked about poetry expressions that young people engage with, often associate the articulation of cultural difference with non-printed forms of poetry, as well as with contemporary urban culture. The term

“urban culture” was used in line with the definition in SAGE Encyclopaedia of Urban Studies, as referring “to the meanings, ways of life, and social practices associated with the modern city. Urban culture is made at the interface of society, community, and the built environment” (Hutchison 2010:856). Interviewees acknowledged that French and Spanish contemporary young urban cultures are extraordinarily syncretic. They echoed what cultural studies investigating current cultural movements in Western societies stress: that cultural syncretism is a characteristic shared (in varied ways and levels of intensity) by contemporary urban cultures. Plastic art forms like graffiti, musical forms like rap or hip-hop and different syncretic dance styles shape contemporary urban culture. Within these expressions different styles and meanings are combined. Experts paying attention to the influences of diverse contemporary urban art (e.g., Ferrel 1993, Delgado 1998) demonstrate that a large proportion of urban artistic manifestations in Western countries has been shaped by cultural practices that have emerged from minorities¹⁵⁸ whose cultural, often mixed, heritage feels diminished or excluded by the dominant Eurocentric norm.

Emerging in connection with the discussion about cultural syncretism in contemporary forms such as spoken word and rap or hip hop lyrics, French and Spanish interviewees often reflected on the contrast between young people’s resistance to school poetry and their engagement with the spoken word or song lyrics. Discussion about informal learning settings triggered responses about various factors that concern existing differences in young people’s engagement with poetry, not only between school and non-school settings but also between primary and secondary stages of schooling.

The most salient commonality in French and Spanish poetry by poets speaking

¹⁵⁸ As happened in America with black neighbourhoods and street gang environments

from positions in-between cultural traditions is the space of circulation of their poetry. The works of poets deriving from European conventions that remain stable in Spanish and French school poetry corpora belong to an official public space of recognition. However, the works of poets articulating a negotiation between unbalanced cultures belong to a contemporary unofficial time and space of recognition where the boundaries of the idea of poetry are blurred. This is the time and space of contemporary young culture. However, institutionally dominated subject positions are not stable but permeable and subject to revision.

Concerns relating to value also emerged. There is a frequent association between youth culture and aesthetic poverty. The abundance of simplistic and aesthetically poor expressions in many contemporary expressions (e.g. some rap lyrics) made many experts defensive about poetry associated with contemporary youth culture.

6.4 Considerations about the contextualization of Spanish and French interviewees' answers

The relevance of contextual patterns here illustrates how blurred the boundaries are between the context of this research and the research topic. This is a common concern in research projects investigating social causes and structures of cultural and educational issues. Normalized contexts are configured by social, cultural and political ideas and attitudes that are not static and can be challenged.

Certain issues, about the place and value of poetry in France as compared to Spain, were observable while organizing the interviews. These are described

below as they reinforce previous observations about the fields of poetry for young people in France and Spain (Chapter 2) and can help to place the comments of interviewees adequately into their contextual frameworks.

French experts were more available and more interested in participating in this research. It was easier to identify people interested in promoting poetry in France than in Spain from each of the categories of informants that I had scheduled. Also, obtaining the agreement and engagement of French interviewees was not very complicated but I needed perseverance and a good deal of tact to find fruitful ways to insist in the Spanish case. In relative terms the Spanish interviewees that I selected were as representative of the Spanish context as the French informants. However, the latter generally showed better preparation and wider perspectives on the issues dealt with than the Spanish. For instance, I chose one informant per category but the French interviewees in particular had specialized knowledge based on the particular standpoint from which they were being interviewed (e.g., editors or leaders of teaching programmes). French interviewees also shared knowledge they had gained from other perspectives. A good example is one of the French editors from a big mainstream publishing house (interviewee 2Fa) who is also a teacher of training programmes for secondary school teachers. Also, the other editor from the same publishing house, 2Fb, had been a secondary school teacher for years and is now an inspector of the French national educational system who observes school practice on a regular basis. Similarly, the director of the French poetry organization that I interviewed, 4F, was himself a poet and playwright who had also been a poetry editor, a schoolteacher and a teacher's instructor (in a French university) for many years. The knowledge of Spanish representative informants interviewed for my research questions generally came from the single perspective of the interviewee's position (e.g., editors were just editors and had never been poets or teachers). As a result, the information obtained in

the French interviews was richer than the information obtained in the comparable categories from the Spanish interviews.

There are also relevant differences between contexts in the investment of material resources in the production and dissemination of poetry. The lesser interest and specialization of Spanish people as compared to the French is probably both a consequence and a factor that maintains differences in the volume, significance and variety of resources dedicated to poetry education at national levels. Both French and Spanish people interested in poetry complained about the neglect of poetry in educational agendas. However, France publishes much more poetry in relation to Spain (interviewee 3F mentioned some quantitative data), hosts many more poetry events with a decisive impact on citizens' lives, and creates more bridges between school and public cultural events. Unsurprisingly, the comments of the Spanish interviewees as compared to the French, about other learning settings, seemed in general terms weaker, less informed and less interested than in the French case. Comparing contexts needs to consider that the less varied and significant the offer of poetry alternatives for young people is, the more significant the representation of poetry conveyed by schools.

An example of difference in the dedication of resources to poetry teaching in the school context can be seen in the fact that French editors like the ones interviewed for this work dedicate more time and resources to the preparation of textbooks¹⁵⁹ than Spanish editors. As a result, French editors have more time and means to work on textbook improvement. For instance, the 2F French

¹⁵⁹ The interviewed French editors were two authors dedicated to the preparation of a single textbook. The Spanish editor is only one person and she coordinates the contributions of many authors. They say that they spend around a year preparing each textbook and each edition stays for an average of 4 years before a new edition is issued. Spanish market decentralization does not help because they can be preparing a new textbook for around one year but they prepare different versions and the editions are renewed too often, mainly because of changes in educational policies.

editors explained, to illustrate their personal commitment, when engaged in the construction of a new textbook they constantly think about ways to find original and appropriate artworks that would suit one poem or another. Spanish editors complained about lack of time and resources for preparing textbooks. Interviewee 2S said that they (editors) work with many constraints, mainly lack of time, in the preparation of each new edition of a textbook and “our working dynamic does not help us as editors to reflect on these issues (...) I guess this is even more the case for teachers”. Also, Spanish and French interviewed editors from alternative publishing houses, who know each other from international fairs and know well the overall situation of both markets, explained that French publishing houses are more successful at selling poetry in France than their colleagues in Spain.

6.5 How issues about pedagogical strategies complicated the discussions with interviewees

The informants that I interviewed did not only give me information about the availability or unavailability of poetry that can be considered from a postcolonial perspective. They also discussed cultural and educational factors underlying the current level of visibility and accessibility of poetry that articulates the negotiation of different cultural identities. Engaging in discussions with varied Spanish and French agents involved in the field of poetry for young people illustrates that working on the conditions of production and reception of poetry for young people, in the face of crucial challenges posed by global cultural and educational agendas marked by cultural imbalances, is a challenge that both Spanish and French poetry fields need to approach.

After talking about poetry in school and young people's engagement with poetry in varied forms and other cultural scenes, a few confrontational questions were introduced during the interviews to induce further discussion and to critically re-examine what interviewees had presented up to that point. Confrontational questions are ones in which the researcher-subject position comes into the open and the subjects can challenge the interviewer's assumptions, leading to a more equal power balance of the interview interaction.

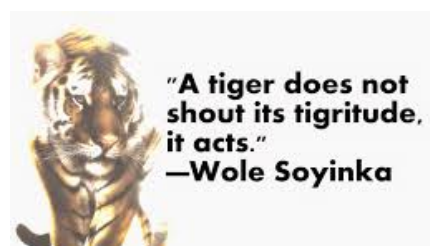
I used sentences from Unesco's declaration of the World Poetry Day as a stimulus:

"Poetry is one of the purest expressions of linguistic freedom. It is a component of the identity of peoples and it embodies the creative energy of culture, for it can be continuously renewed"

UNESCO declaration of World Poetry Day poetry day (Bokova 1999)

The aim was to trigger further reflection on some possibly knotty issues that had been emerging during the interviews while asking about both school poetry and poetry outside the school context. Unstructured responses about intermingled issues, that complicated my exploration of the research questions, appeared.

6.5.1 About the need or pertinence of applying particular approaches to poetry that articulate cultural difference



Adapting to the progress of each particular interview I asked if, in the light of what we had previously discussed, interviewees could conclude that poetry currently available for young people illustrated poetry's inherent suitability for expressing the creative energy of cultures, for "it can be continuously renewed" (Bokova 1999). The inclusion of poetry that brings rhythms, themes and perspectives from non-European cultures into French and Spanish educational practice is seen as beneficial and necessary. Particularly, the contributions of interviewees reflect a consensus of interest in making school poetry more culturally diverse.

To stimulate a dialogue with interviewees about conditions, attitudes and approaches that seem more favourable to improving cultural diversity, and so try to better understand how cultural diversity is understood, I also mentioned Unesco's exhortation to engagement through the universality of poetry. Stressing the power of poetry "transmitted from generation to generation, in the hallowed texts of great authors and in the works of anonymous poets", the International organization insists that "we are duty bound to transmit this heritage for it bears living witness to the cultural diversity of humanity. We, in turn, must tend it to bear fruit, as a source of linguistic wealth and dialogue" (Bokova 2013). When it came to expressing their opinions about how the "we" of the declaration, understood as agents involved in culture and education for young people, could make poetry bear fruit as a source of linguistic wealth and dialogue, however, problems were seen. The comments from interviewees reflected a lack of knowledge, commitment, practical interest or resolution regarding developing concrete action that would foster the opening up of more space for poetry that articulates the negotiation of unbalanced cultural heritages. This is an important issue that is considered in the next chapter, dedicated to future action.

Despite agreeing on the need to offer young people more culturally diverse poetry selections, most French and Spanish agents seemed unconvinced about the usefulness or need to apply or develop particular approaches that would foreground the cultural difference articulated by some poetry.¹⁶⁰ French interviewees 4F and 3F and Spanish interviewees 5S and 1S showed disapproval of developing specific pedagogical support for poetry that deploys features that are culturally distinctive from a more conventional norm. They feared that specific pedagogical strategies would compartmentalize a field that is already weak and neglected. Interviewee 3F also made comments about the fact that the use of particular approaches can imply categorizing texts according to common cultural patterns, which might lead to geographical or racial determinism. The common denominator of the various interviewees' answers was a belief that focusing on developing particular strategies to support young people's engagement with postcolonial poetry would divert educational efforts away from recovering essential aspects of poetry education. The interviewees are people who believe in poetry and are passionate about it, and interested in the progress and promotion of poetry for young people. Thus, echoing Soyinka's quote opening this section, they often stand against an understanding of poetry as a ladder to anything apart from the pleasurable appreciation of what Edward Alan Poe defined as the rhythmical creation of beauty. The comment of one interviewee illustrated the distrustful attitude of most interviewed participants: "approaching cultural difference is not the job of poetry education"¹⁶¹ said interviewee 1S, explicitly. As the following section will explain, interviewees were concerned with highlighting arguments and seeking ways to resist fitting poetry education into material efficiency

¹⁶⁰ Comes from this conversation: « It is evident, it's evident, look, take any language, it can be Spanish, French or English, each has common data, subject to each language's exigencies, but each of these languages also has evidently many variations because a language can't be immobilized easily". (See transcript in Appendix 6)

¹⁶¹ Poetry education needs to be included in a global educational agenda about cultural diversity (Chapter 2).

educational agendas that aim for the measurable assessment of concrete abilities.

If most French and Spanish agents ¹⁶² involved in the selection and dissemination of texts for young readers were not keen to talk about concrete ways to deal with cultural imbalances in poetry, they did agree on the pertinence of discussing two kinds of pedagogical matters in more depth. The first pedagogical issue that emerged as a constant in the interviews was that poetry is best defined by poems. Therefore, they sustained that increasing young people's exposure to larger and more diversified poetry selections would contribute to expanding what defines the field of poetry. As Spanish participant 1Sb put it, "prioritizing diversity is a pedagogical action that concerns, first and foremost, the selection of texts" (...). For him, "the mediation practice that we need most urgently is to offer diversified, conscious and open selections of poetry but mainly wide and numerous selections, many many poems". Interviewees discussed how to increase poetry diversity in ways that take into account expressions that young people engage with outside the controlled, institutionalized sphere of school. With regard to this issue the ontological status of poetry surfaced recurrently, as the problematic issue of the poetry field's contested limits was especially at stake. As interviewee 5S puts it, "these are sometimes called poetry but many times not". Spanish interviewee 2S asserted that "they [young people] do engage with poetry spontaneously (...) what happens is that adults and young people don't agree over what can be called poetry". She argued: "they [again, young people] don't want to call poetry the things that they like, although these could be seen as pertaining to the poetry domain". French interviewee 5F talked about the same issue but put it the other way round: "Young people do not naturally go towards poetry or,

¹⁶² With the exception of two particularly interested interviewees who suggested ideas that could support a postcolonial approach to poetry teaching (developed in Chapter 7).

better said, what they spontaneously go towards is not considered poetry by the majority of people". In the same vein Spanish interviewee 2S said, "young people resist any attempt to assimilate any creation that belongs to their young culture into anything that could be called poetry". However, interviewee 4S said that young people are now "proudly calling poetry many products of urban cultural movements". French interviewee 4F insisted on the need to stretch the limits of poetry representation because "young people don't resist or dislike poetry but a representation of poetry (...) that conveys the wrong view about poetry and side-lines the essence of poetry". These opinions highlighted a belief in how poems that may challenge previously held understandings of what constitutes poetry are sometimes perceived as causing an ontological problem. French interviewee 4F explained that this ontological instability needed to be recognized and embraced rather than resisted. According to him, the "ontological ambiguity of poetry is inherent to poetry's essence because poetry is the literary form that best represents the ambiguity of language".

As a second pedagogical concern, interviewees insisted that some essential but side-lined aspects of poetry education needed to be reworked¹⁶³. Most interviewees, being specialists in poetry for young people from different perspectives, elaborated on how conceptualizations and approaches to poetry for young people should be critically explored. For them the aim is to recover the importance in educational contexts of some aspects of poetry that make more visible poetry's suitability to express the dynamic energies of cultures. They recognized the advantages that the incorporation of poetry embodying varied cultural heritages could accrue in making poetry education compatible with education in cultural diversity but preferred to highlight important issues that are being neglected in poetry education, rather than discuss specific

¹⁶³ Many discussions about what poetry is arrive at the conclusion that poetry is best defined by poems.

approaches to cultural difference in poetry. The following section develops educational issues that interviewees saw as obstacles for enhancing poetry's capacities to articulate cultural difference.

6.6 Western educational agendas, postcolonial approaches and the neglect of critical features of poetry

Some interviewee answers suggested that Western liberal ideas shape educational thinking on cultural diversity and also influence the construction of poetry representations. Some ideas were thought to obstruct the freedom of action necessary to create the conditions in which poets from varied cultural traditions might permeate poetry education. This section summarises concurring opinions about how Western educational agendas contribute to the neglect of critical features of poetry that a postcolonial approach to poetry, particularly to some contemporary poetry drawing on non-European poetry traditions, especially highlights.

6.6.1 Discussing what poetry is according to what it is used for

"Poetry is not an art of dreams and illusion but a way to understand and to express oneself and to understand the relationship between one-self and the other."
(Glissant 2003:10)¹⁶⁴

Several answers coincided in claiming that educational approaches which sideline aspects of poetry, such as the sound of a poem and its capacity "to talk a universal language" (3F), help to maintain unchallenged collective

¹⁶⁴ La poétique non comme un art du rêve et de l'illusion mais comme une manière de se concevoir, de concevoir son rapport à soi-même et à l'autre et de l'exprimer.

representations of poetry that are both rejected by young people and difficult to link to some contemporary poetry¹⁶⁵. The collective understanding of poetry for young people is determined by its use, and the use of poetry maintained by utilitarian educational agendas promotes a representation of poetry that leaves little space for the articulation of cultural difference. This is what poetry critic and author Amittai F. Aviram talked about when he signalled that “part of the problem is theoretical, that our very definition of poetry, our sense of how to read and how to teach the reading of poetry and, consequently, some of our current methods and styles of making poetry are substantial causes of poetry’s loss of importance” (1994: 1).

The progress of the interviews, which started by talking about “what do you [the interviewee] consider to be the main objectives in poetry selections for young audiences” (Appendix 6), led to both Spanish and French participants talking about the need to revisit some educational objectives or functions with regard to poetry teaching. Interviewees such as Spanish 3S and 4S, as well as 4F and 5F, blamed educational assessment for the neglect of qualities of poetry that are difficult to quantify. “Educational assessment based on quantifiable value gives prominence to features of poetry that are not the essence of poetry” or that are not “the most essential for a humanist education” (4F). The beliefs of Spanish and French agents interested in the revitalization of poetry for young people also coincide with what international scholars note: “Perhaps the most important thing that we can take from many of the chapters of this book... the teaching of poetry needs always to keep in touch with the sensual aesthetic qualities of poetry” (Barrs and Styles 2013:191). Both French and Spanish interviewees claimed that crucial aspects of poetry are neglected because poetry

¹⁶⁵ This coincides with the opinion of international poetry experts that educational agendas need to be reconsidered to dismantle negative attitudes towards poetry: “in order to overcome these problems, our notions and formulations of poetry in school need to embrace the multi-modality of poetry - its rhythmic, oral and visual dimension: the diversity of poetry - its varied forms, modes of presentation and cultures (Snapper 2013:34).

is being used as an instrument for acculturation and for the apprehension of linguistic technical skills (e.g., rhetorical, metrical, etc.)¹⁶⁶. The conditions for the existence of poetry that cannot be used for current assessment objectives “because their most salient qualities are not best suited to exemplifying poetry’s utility as professed by the school curriculum” (5S) are not favourable. For interviewee 4F this issue revealed the most important and yet unchallenged contradiction in school poetry teaching: “The only thing that a utilitarian educational agenda is able to do with poetry is to transmit concepts like the history of poetry or measurable characteristics of poems”. However, this informed agent insisted “but this is not teaching poetry¹⁶⁷ (...) this is opposed to the essence of poetry, to what makes poetry unique and important for the education of the individual”.

Not all the interviewees questioned Western educational agendas with the depth and intensity that interviewee 4F did. However, other interviewees also pointed to concrete examples to illustrate prevailing attitudes in the sphere of school poetry that hinder the application of postcolonial approaches. For interviewee 2F the pervasiveness of these prevailing attitudes could be seen in how pupils frequently understand poetry when asked in a school context. Thus: “in France when you ask an adolescent what they think about a poem they have read, they usually offer mechanical answers of the kind, this is written in alexandrine or this is a sonnet or this poem has this kind of metric, but they will not talk about emotions”. Interviewee 3F mentioned that he has often obtained

¹⁶⁶ What interviewee 4F says about teaching poetry’s essence as contrary to current systems of educational assessment is extensible to the outcomes of learning about other art forms. As the benefits of art appreciation are difficult to account for and measure they cannot be assessed. Educational efforts that do not support efficiency educational agendas are less deserving of investment.

¹⁶⁷ Poetry highlights its universality through the sensorial apprehension of emotions. Bernstein stresses that sound can “never be completely recuperated as ideas, as content, as narrative, as extra lexical meaning. The tension between sound and logic reflects the physical resistance in the medium of poetry” (1999:299).

similar responses when asking adolescents about poems because they are too used to doing “mechanical readings” of poetry in school. For him this illustrates the pervasiveness in French schools of “an obsolete understanding of poetry education”.

Other international scholars also share the concern of Spanish and French participants about the dominance of disembodied exercises in poetry teaching in the secondary school, and the impact of school assessment objectives in poetry education¹⁶⁸. However, in France more time and resources are spent on aspects of poetry that are subtler and less quantifiable.

6.6.2 Body, sound and school education

“Hearing is the sense most favoured by attention; it holds the frontier, so to speak, at the point where seeing fails”¹⁶⁹.
Valéry (1871:2016:v)

The scarce presence in Spanish and French secondary education of poetry forms and traditions that emphasize the sensory and bodily experience of poetry was perceived as a structural setback of educational agendas based on material instrumentalist ¹⁷⁰ educational practices. Interviewees reported that when literature education deals with the transition from childhood to adulthood, it “tries to erase the remains of young children’s natural disposition towards sensory aspects of poetry” (4F). This is what Margaret Meek stressed poetically:

¹⁶⁸ These common preoccupations are also pointed out by British scholars, confirming that in other Western agendas “One of the big problems of poetry education is that it is the easily identifiable formal features of poems that often become the focus of attention, and that assume a disproportionate importance in the minds of both teachers and students (Styles and Barrs 2013:184). More time and resources tend to be spent on the aspects of poetry that are thought to be teachable (e.g. rhyme) than on the aspects that are subtler and less easily generalized about (e.g. rhythm).

¹⁶⁹ L'oreille est le sens préféré de l'attention. Elle garde en quelque sorte, la frontière du côté où la vue ne voit pas.

¹⁷⁰ Trends in the field of textbook-related research point out that “The invention of ‘teaching machines’ (...) was intended to lead to a greater efficiency in the processes of learning.” (Fuchs 2014: 70).

“poetry is never better understood than in childhood, when it is felt in the blood and along the bone” (1991:182).

Interviewee 4F asserted that “the transmission of poetry’s vitality through oral emphasis is a key aspect of the sensory perception of poetry”. However, as children attain “serious stages of schooling, the non-intellectual apprehension of poetry tends to be forgotten in literature education” (interviewee 4S). This coincides with the opinion of experts in poetry education from different European educational systems, who point out that “speaking poetry and listening to its sounds and rhythms are fundamental activities in engagement with poetry that are sadly overlooked in classrooms” (Barrs et al 2014: 3).

Spanish interviewee 4S argued: “school education needs to pay attention to poetry and approaches that can serve as a progression between the last years of primary and the first years of secondary school, where the transition between poetry as wordplay and poetry as emotive and pleasurable reading should occur”. The approach to teaching poetry in the Spanish primary school education system contrasts with secondary years of schooling, said the Spanish interviewee: “In the first years of school there is a frequent interest in young children’s engagement with rhythmic games and in perceiving the melody of a poem” but “in the secondary school the main concern is text interpretation and the identification of metrical and rhetorical devices”. Also, French interviewee 4F explained that young French children are not asked to understand poetry but later demands for rational understanding of poetry as children grow older contribute to creating a gap between children’s and adolescents’ engagement with poetry¹⁷¹.

¹⁷¹ Gary Snapper exemplifies with Billy Collins’ poem “Introduction to poetry” how “the search for meaning in poetry study can be reductive and dulls us to other pleasures that poetry offers” (2013: 31).

Spanish interviewee 3S also associated young people's resistance to poetry with a decrease in exposure to oral traditions, oral modes of transmission and the aural qualities of poetry. According to him, not only do young children grow away from contact with oral traditions but also "resistance to poetry begins occurring when children stop listening to poetry, which unfortunately happens when they become autonomous readers and adults stop reading to them, both in school and at home".

French interviewee 4F engaged more deeply with the issue of how traditional approaches to poetry prevailing in the official education of adolescents obstruct the visibility of poetry from cultures with a strong imprint from oral traditions. He said that "all European societies sacrifice the sensory perception of the world, I would even say that we disdain it, in favour of an overvaluation of conceptual representation (...) all learning acquisition and all our concerns are directed to feeding the child with concepts, so that the child dominates language with a conceptual discourse, don't they? Children's apprehension of reality is not based on concepts but on sensorial apprehension¹⁷²". He further insisted that "Western education is governed by a conceptual understanding that is set apart from sensory engagement with the poem (...) but a deep appreciation of poetry does not fit with conceptual understanding". Interviewee 4F, who described himself as a "poetry activist", explained that his standpoint signals "my activism is to fight for the essential place of poetry in school and poetry (...) because poetry is by definition the antidote against conceptual discourse (...) It is natural, fair and necessary that children learn conceptual discourse but if we separate it from the embodied experience of the poem the bodily experience is undervalued and this has negative

¹⁷² "His understanding of the world is intuitive and sensorial."

consequences”¹⁷³. In a similar vein Spanish literary critic and educationalist Victor Moreno has also complained about how bodily engagement with a poem is largely side-lined. He said in an interview for an online Spanish educational magazine: “Western traditional obsession with intellectual meaning making favours contexts where poetry is neglected (...) this not only happens in school education but also at the level of society” (2005). Moreno, who in some sense shows a similar (to interviewee 4F) activist standpoint in his promotion of poetry for young people in the Spanish context, indicated similar obstacles to the circulation of poetry, appreciation of which particularly needs to prioritize bodily and sensory apprehension over rational understanding of the poem ¹⁷⁴ “Society is exaggeratedly devoted to nurturing ideas. We attend to ideological confrontations on a daily basis but not aesthetic debates. To talk about the senses is considered feebleness and uselessness. The Western world still suffers from an obsession with ideas and rationality”(4F). Moreno also signals an excessive intellectualism in the educational system, which does not recognize the importance of senses, has negative consequences for the literary education of students and ultimately for the course of knowledge production in the Western world.

¹⁷³ He goes on: “We have, us in Europe in any case, the idea that we can only be proficient users of a language... language proficiency... we say, when we understand immediately and without ambiguity, when we are sure of what we have listened to and we are able to resume it. Well, that is to reduce language extraordinarily. This prejudgement is very damaging. It has been inherited from French Cartesians but it is a common token all over Europe. It is the idea that we can only seize what is real if we have a language that controls reality. A language that immobilises what reality is. I mean, we need to give one and only one sense to every thing to avoid misconceptions. But the work of the poet is to do exactly the opposite. Poetry looks for the restlessness of the sense. Poetry is a subversion of language”.

¹⁷⁴ This agent also denounces as a “serious mistake, an authentic burden of the educational system, the search for knowledge and the approach to writing and reading as a mere addition of ideas with no relationship whatsoever to the senses as an important filter of existence (...) The senses are the natural doors for any positive approach to knowledge. Unfortunately, we keep on being subdued to a conspicuously reactionary rationality that maintains understanding apart from the senses”.

6.6.3 Reflecting about recovering body and sound and the postcolonial perspective

“Emotion which is necessarily embodied, functions in social processes as the basis of agency”
(Barbalet and Lyon 1994:50)

Recent research in children’s poetry (Jeffries 2009, Pullinger 2012) considers that the vitality and vigour conveyed through musicality and closeness to oral traditions is one of its distinctive features. Scholars exploring diverse children’s poetry traditions (e.g., Opie 1969¹⁷⁵, Pelegrin 1994, Resmond Wenz 2011) have highlighted children’s disposition towards poetry. This disposition is related to children’s attraction to poetry’s musicality, since the rhythm and music in poetry are what first incites children’s responses.

Reflecting on human consciousness in relation to poetry in performance, poet Charles Bernstein calls attention to the fact that “human consciousness has as much a sedimentary as a developmental disposition” (1998:21). Attention to young people’s engagement with poetry could consider, as part of the sedimentary disposition of human consciousness, that children’s inclination towards aurality and musicality does not disappear as a natural part of children’s growth. Despite the fact that poetry education increasingly overlooks sound in the poem as the child grows older “stages in human development don’t much replace each other so much as infiltrate or interpenetrate each other” (ibid). Unsurprisingly interviewee 3S argued that adolescents are attracted to poetry where the sound in the poem is foregrounded: “we only need to take a look at the success of rap”. Interviewee 1S said that young people “are naturally attracted to poetry traditions that are highly rhythmic”. Further, interviewee 5S mentioned that young people are now participating

¹⁷⁵ The Opies demonstrated in years of research that young people’s attraction to the aurality and musicality of poetry is an international feature

enthusiastically in interactive events that take place as part of the cultural life of some Spanish local communities thanks to the arrival of multicultural groups. This is the case for Brazilian *rondas de capoeira*¹⁷⁶ or Senegalese workshops that work with the performance tradition of African griots¹⁷⁷, where local young people participate in call and response games. Linking the need to recover the relevance of oral/aural features with the interest of young people in musical and performative cultural traditions suggests the possibility of multimodal poetry teaching strategies.

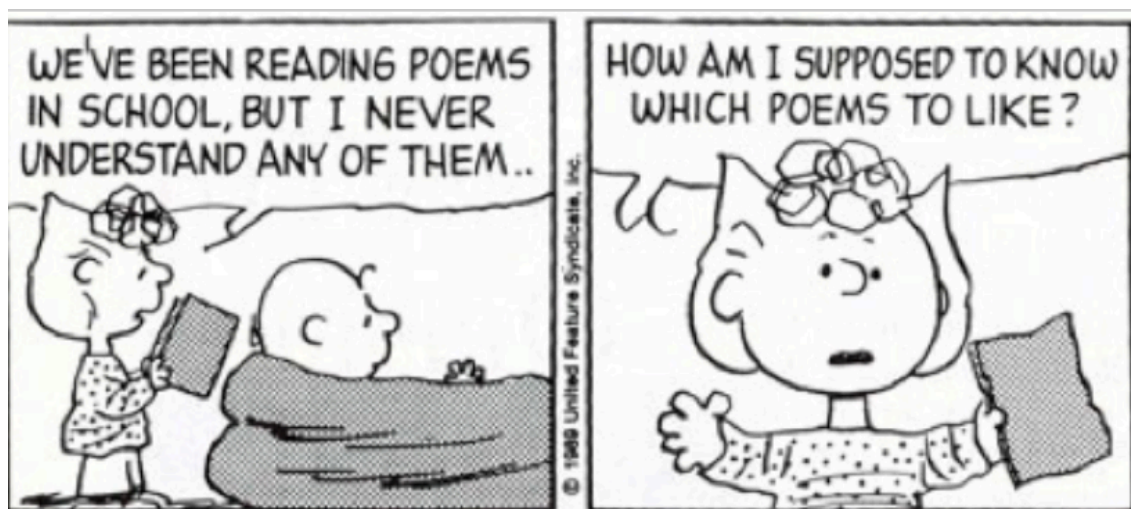
Scholars who participate in postcolonial debates argue that the supremacy of the eye¹⁷⁸ and the mind in Eurocentric ideologies distances Western thought from other perspectives on knowing the world and producing cultural expression (Mignolo 2009). Poets who draw on cultural literary heritages that use predominantly oral modes of transmission and forms challenge the supremacy of the eye and rational mind. Some poetry inspired by oral inheritances “seek to give voice to a past that colonialism degraded, garbled, even gagged” (Ramazani 2001: 9). Research about poetry in school education realizes that prioritizing rational engagement with poems leads to young people (and adults) having negative attitudes towards poetry, since “the search for meaning in poetry can be reductive and dulls us to other pleasures that poetry offers” (Snapper 2013: 31). A paradigm of meaning-making that draws strongly from oral cultures stresses particularly how poetry challenges the dominance of rational understanding by highlighting the apprehension of sense through bodily experiences. Emphasizing poetry’s subversion of rational understanding from a postcolonial perspective resists an association between

¹⁷⁶ Capoeira is an African Brazilian Martial art. It is performed accompanied by music and in the middle of people who participate in the event by repeating some verses like a call and response game.

¹⁷⁷ In West African traditions, the griots are considered the repository of oral tradition.

¹⁷⁸ Criticism of the ocularcentrism of Western culture claims there is a Cartesian-hegemonic model of vision throughout the modern era. [Mignolo’s *Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing*. 2013]

liking poetry and understanding poetry (Charlie Brown's illustration Illustration 1 on Chapter 1¹⁷⁹):



6.6.4 Re-examining the boundaries of poetry and its status

"Poetry is a clamour, it must be heard as music. The poetry that is designated to be only read and closed in its typography is an unfinished poetry¹⁸⁰."
(Ferré 1956: préface)

The contributions of interviewees in relation to the acknowledgment of a postcolonial approach to poetry signal the hegemony of a representation of poetry that is mainly Eurocentric and has rigid boundaries. Such hegemony is "not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation" but rather "as a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (Williams 2005:38). However, interviewees participating in this research can be seen as potential agents for change. They agree that moving a step forward into revitalizing the field of poetry for young people involves challenging current representations of poetry, its use and its limits.

¹⁷⁹ Shows how (ironically, probably, in this comic strip) liking and understanding school poems are portrayed in a continuum. If Sally Brown, the youngest sister of Charlie, doesn't understand the poems she reads how can she know if she likes them?

¹⁸⁰ "La poésie est une clameur, elle doit être entendue comme la musique. Toute poésie destinée à n'être que lue et enfermée dans sa typographie n'est pas finie"

Awareness of the fact that the limits of the poetry field are socially constructed and depend on cultural perception is therefore a precondition for opening the field of poetry to both culturally diverse poetry and poetry education that accounts for young people's cultural life. Such awareness calls for a healthy critical debate in which some would defend as an effective strategy the juxtaposition of different poetry modes and forms, encounters with a rich diet of diverse poems, and lyrics that need music or performance for their full mode of being.

6.6.5 Questioning institutionalized attempts to immobilize language

“Poetry, whatever the manifest content of the poem, a poem is always a violation of the
rationalism and morality of bourgeois society.”
(Paz 1988:5)

Interviewee 4F denounced the scarce presence of language variation in poetry as a prevailing incoherence in mainstream French poetry education, something that could also be seen in Spanish selections of poetry for young people. According to him, this issue affects the chances of a postcolonial approach to poetry being incorporated into dominant practice because poetry that enacts the negotiation of cultural imbalances is poetry that “questions quite explicitly institutionalized attempts to immobilize language” (Interviewee 4F). He went on to explain that “behind the evolution of each of these languages [he mentions French, English and Spanish as examples] there is a parallel history of institutionalized power trying to immobilize the language to a common rhythm, a certified syntax etc. In all cultures, poetry happens precisely to question this, always always and in every single culture (...) All poets from all cultures are involved in this universal battle (...) poets fight language immobilization”. The issue, for this French agent, was to realize that “all poetry, from any culture of the world, oral or written is meant to be a space of

divergence". He stressed that if poetry was perceived, as "a space of divergence then poetry is the natural place of enunciation for cultural difference". However, the school curriculum reflects a codified cultural consensus emerging in controlled and institutionalized environments that tend to leave little space for divergence. To be perceived as a space of divergence and a natural place for the enunciation of cultural difference "poetry needs to be approached differently, outside of the current pedagogical functions that guide the cultural consensus governing school poetry" (4F).

Interviewee 4F alluded to the fact that poets coming from different traditions in different periods have defended poetry's subversion of conventions because this function of poetry helps to build and rebuild language and culture, a dynamic dimension of poetry that UNESCO's declaration of the World Poetry Day stresses.

6.6.6 Poetry and youth culture

"Adolescents are the bearers of cultural renewal, those cycles of generation and regeneration that link our limited individual destinies with the destiny of the species" (Kaplan 1995: 338)

Observations of school poetry books and interviewees' answers reveal that bridges between school as a learning setting and the information channels and venues used by youth culture, which are both popular and contemporary, are still scarcely developed (especially in the Spanish case) in real practice. Scholars Marsh and Millard explain that popular culture does not attract enough interest in the academic world "when we turn our attention to the sort of texts that are commonly used with children" (2001:1). This issue is pointed out by Interviewee 1F, who argued that "probably the descendants of migrant communities and even people from Ultramar [French but from non-metropolitan France] are the youth who identify less with the kind of distant poetry that still governs school". This is what made interviewees associate the

application of postcolonial approaches to poetry and practice with young people from culturally and socially disadvantaged communities. Interestingly, when Georges Jean developed arguments in the eighties in favour of paying attention to popular poetry in the secondary school he made a connection that is especially relevant here. This was between popular poetry from postcolonial cultures and the need to shorten distances between secondary school students and school poetry, including considering the cultural traditions of a growing share of young populations: “young people who, coming from other places, Maghreb, Africans, Arabs, Asians etc. for whom popular poetry is often the only space that helps them keep the link with their cultural background and their mother tongue, so easily forgotten”(1989: 113)¹⁸¹. Jean’s reflections about the French context of the 1980s seem to apply especially well to not only the current French context but also the Spanish, since European young people’s popular culture is increasingly infused with influences from beyond the traditional Western cultural heritage. Interviewees remarked that this could be most easily appreciated when looking at popular music and dancing styles.

6.6.7 Poetry’s universalism, cultural difference and a postcolonial standpoint

“Contemporary theoretical practices identified as postcoloniality could be extended to encompass all critical reflections on diversity as universal project”(Shohat 1992:99).

Interviewees, despite signalling that cultural diversity in school poetry is understood as a polarization between national versus foreign poetry, defended poetry’s universalism. They argued that revisiting school education entails “showing that all poetry talks the same universal language”. French

¹⁸¹ My translation of: Sin contar los chicos y chicas llegados de otras partes, magrebíes, árabes, africanos, asiáticos para los que muchas veces la poesía popular es el único lugar que les mantiene un poco unidos a su país de origen y a su lengua maternal, tan fácilmente olvidada.

interviewee 4F said:¹⁸² “I think the issue is not about thinking about national poetry and poetry from other cultures because poetry is universal by definition”. This seems in line with a postcolonial approach to poetry focusing on how intercultural dynamics are not articulated in binary terms but in a heterogeneity that is anchored in the negotiation between exoticist¹ categories of thought (such as modernity/tradition, civilization/slavery, same/other, dominated/ dominant) and the reductive categorizing essentialism that some interviewees feared. However, most interviewees tended to limit the discussions about erasing cultural hierarchies in poetry to how “poetry is per se a universal language” and how “all poets from different cultural influences are involved in the same battle” (interviewee 4F).

Merely insisting on poetry’s universalism when approaching poetry from varied cultural heritages risks veiling cultural imbalances between unequal heritages, and between oral and written traditions. The poetic form has a particular potential efficacy in intercultural education that is not currently being exploited nor discussed in French and Spanish school practice. Poetic compression demands that discrepant idioms and soundscapes, tropes and subgenres be forced together with intensity. When bringing poetry into critical conversations about globalization the challenge for educators and mediators is to help young people perceive how the complex texture of poems reveals identity struggles related to cultural negotiations, even when they cannot be fully grasped by the rational mind. Poetry opens up spaces “to develop a deeper understanding of intercultural practices” (Obied 2013: 145).

A point that was intended to be discussed during the interviews but was difficult to engage participants in was how mediation practices can help young

¹⁸² Comes from this conversation: « It is evident, its evident, look, take any language, it can be Spanish, French or English, each share common data, each is subject to each language’s exigencies, but each of these languages also has evidently many variations because a language can’t be immobilized easily”. From transcript in Appendix 6

people perceive markers of difference that cannot be assimilated or neutralized. A postcolonial approach to poetry takes into account Unesco's proclamation of the suitability of poetry for expressing and appreciating the dynamic conditions of cultures but is attentive to the possibility of moving beyond superficial approaches to education in cultural diversity. This is to avoid what happens in some literature for young people labelled as multicultural, which "gestures toward an acceptance of cultural difference but reinscribes an ideological position in which one culture has superiority or power over another" (Dudek 2011: 155). In this vein Spanish children's literature scholar Teresa Colomer highlights the need to review the depth and width of superficial multicultural agendas in Western school curricula. She thinks that multicultural agendas also need to take into account that "the representation of new integrational frameworks and intercultural knowledge inside the same society are current challenges of a literary education" (2005:26). From a postcolonial standpoint it is important to pay attention to perceptions of an education in cultural diversity with relation to cultural difference because "the revision of the history of critical theory rests on the notion of cultural difference, not cultural diversity" (Bhabha 2006:156).

6.7 Issues about educators' capacities and interest in poetry that articulates cultural difference

Educators' capacities and attitudes towards poetry are issues that recurred in the interviews. Recovering certain neglected aspects of poetry education, a precondition for improving the visibility of poetry that can be approached with postcolonial lenses, entails acknowledging teachers' capacities to work on these aspects in everyday practice.

People working with poetry and young people in France and Spain signalled the lack of specification of French and Spanish regulations about school poetry as a potential advantage for poetry teachers. Teachers explained that official instructions only dictate a very limited number of poems for compulsory reading, hence individual teachers potentially have enough flexibility to choose poems for their particular context and practice. However, this advantage seems unexploited. Despite a theoretical flexibility, teachers frequently lack the time or training to elaborate and propose their own poetry selections. According to the interviewed participants, teachers' inconstant and often scarce interest in poetry is an obstacle to the promotion of poetry amongst young people and the revitalization of practice in both contexts. For Spanish interviewee 1S, "adults are not fond of poetry, teachers are no exception". Interviewee 4S pointed out that "in Spain teachers' lack of interest in poetry and poor training is perceptible in their excessive reliance on textbook selections" (...) Here the textbook directs the teaching"¹⁸³. Comparing interviewees' comments and secondary data (e.g., recommendations for teaching poetry and some regulations included in Appendix 1) from Spain and France showed that French educators are more inclined towards poetry than their Spanish counterparts. There were agents in the French poetry field who also complained about teachers' lack of interest in poetry teaching but opinions like interviewee's 2F stated, "the feedback that we receive in surveys is that teachers appreciate this section, which according to us means that they are globally fond of poetry and engaged in its transmission"¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸³ In France, the offering of poetry training for teachers is richer than in Spain. French educators also work in a cultural environment that gives more relevance to poetry than their Spanish homologues. Consequently, it is logical that teachers' dependence on the poems and pedagogical sequences selected by textbooks and anthologies is more noticeable in Spain than in France.

The comparison of contexts shows that the chances of improving teachers' disposition towards poetry seem worse in Spain because the Spanish field is less favourable than the French. Some Spanish experts have good intentions, as revealed in interviews (examples: 2S and 5S) with those speaking about Spanish formal educational provision, but their tentative attempts cannot thrive in a context characterized by restricted resources and training, geographical dispersion and the lack of a strong intermediate domain from where ideas can be drawn. However, speakers from relevant French poetry organizations also made comments about teachers' lack of interest. They signal the prevalence of superficial and formulaic teaching approaches to poetry in France. This is what French interviewee 4F pointed out when he said: "teachers miss the essence of the poem when teaching poetry, they sideline poetry, they miss the most important aspects of poetry".

With regard to multicultural issues, Spanish interviewee 4S commented that "dealing with cultural diversity in poetry is just something Spanish teachers, who lack time and poetry training, don't even consider". Both poetry teaching and multicultural education are areas that raise educators' insecurities. This is an issue that concerns other Western educational contexts, such as the British one (Obied 2013). Even in the French case, French interviewees who defended their recent attempts to incorporate more culturally diverse literary texts in pedagogical material (e.g., textbooks) reported that their efforts to include culturally varied poetry selections are not permeating teaching practice because of teacher resistance. One said: "most of the time French teachers stick to what they know (...), they prefer the well-known canonical poetry included in syllabuses". French 2S also explained that "teachers, for instance *in provinces*, don't show any interest in cultural diversity". In France, where there is much public concern about the social integration of cultural minorities, interviewee 2F explained that most French literature teachers are either not interested or not

prepared¹⁸⁵ to deal with cultural imbalances for fear of compromising social stability, a fear that interviewee 4F also pointed out. Discussions about how to deal with cultural imbalances in education touched on delicate issues of social justice (the integration of cultural minorities). Interviewees acknowledged that dealing with cultural imbalances in binary terms in the field of education “soon relates to political and social confrontation” (2F). In general terms, when talking to the interviewees the relationship between poetry, political issues and social engagement seemed to be especially perceived with suspicion. According to interviewees, teachers who usually prefer to avoid supposedly problematic social and political issues in education might tend to see the poetry field as a static and safe realm that can justify avoiding confronting cultural or social imbalances. The fact that poetry, as compared to prose, has a less superficial and direct connection to social and historical reality might justify an educator’s conformist standpoint in poetry education.

With regard to popular contemporary poetry some difficulties and insecurities came into the open when talking about the educational pertinence and aesthetic value of culturally hybrid expression that emerges from popular forms of dissemination. Often, poetry forms coming from contemporary popular culture are in fact forms of protest against dominant forms, which don’t succeed in being integrated¹⁸⁶. In the case of teachers, the protest tone of some performed poetry and rap/hip hop lyrics aggravates and adds to other anxieties about poetry education and multicultural issues. These expressions are very diverse, in form and quality, and not always overtly protesting. However, young

¹⁸⁵ A growing fear in societies receiving considerable populations from non-Western cultures that have been dominated by Eurocentric cultural domination

¹⁸⁶ This is the case of some poetry performed in slam sessions and also of much hip hop expression. For an interesting study about the issue see Daley, J. C. (2014) *Integration or Interrogation? Franco-Maghrebi Rap and Hip-Hop Culture in Marseille*. Master’s Thesis. City University of New York.

popular culture¹⁸⁷ is often regarded, by both French and Spanish educational and cultural establishments, as being quite vociferous and/or having dubious aesthetic qualities. Vociferous expressions are probably more visible. These issues preoccupy people in the field of education and cultural gatekeepers, as interviewee 5F manifested: “To those who think that young people are already getting poetry through rap, I say no! Absolutely not! (...) young people need real poetry”. The problem is that fears of aesthetic impoverishment and social insecurities impede many experts in the field of education and some cultural gatekeepers from getting involved in discussing poetry that can be assimilated with problematic forms within the limits of poetry education. Interviewees signalled that the lack of cultural consensus makes teachers tend to avoid working with contemporary poetry forms in the classroom. Many contemporary poetry forms lack cultural consensus because they are not recognized as suitable for education nor sometimes even as poetry by cultural gatekeepers¹⁸⁸ and the educational establishment. However, all interviewees showed concern about the need to re-visit poetry teaching for adolescents so as to leave room for more diverse expression in ways that help to overcome – or at least embrace¹⁸⁹ - young people’s resistance to more conventional printed poetry, and subvert the idea of “school poetry as alien to the culture of young people” (interviewee 5F). The task of poetry teachers and mediators is an enabling one consisting of developing “keen readers, keen in the sense of enthusiastic and committed, and keen in the sense of intellectually acute and emotionally aware” (Benton 1992:4). People involved in the promotion of

¹⁸⁷ There exists a common association between youth culture and aesthetic poverty. The abundance of simplistic and aesthetically poor expressions in many contemporary expressions (e.g. rap or hip hop) makes many people from the field of poetry for young people defensive about any kind of poetry that can be associated with contemporary youth culture.

¹⁸⁸ For example, the dominant point of view is that rap lyrics are outside the poetry field’s boundaries. However, rap is the cultural expression that is most favoured by young people. Alternative standpoints recognize the importance of blurring the limits of the poetry field and they pay attention to rap lyrics (e.g. Eric Orsena, see chapter 5).

¹⁸⁹ Interviewee 4F argues that young people’s resistance to conventional poetry is not necessarily a drama, it just highlights the importance of mediation.

poetry for young people acknowledge that the work of poetry teachers can be either helped or hindered by poetry corpora and teaching strategies. The frequent imposition on young people of culturally restrictive poetry corpora and poetry representations is something that all the interviewed participants signalled as an obstacle to the enabling task of poetry mediators, and particularly for school poetry teachers.

According to editors (interviewees 2F) “only teachers who work in particular communities welcome this poetry offering¹⁹⁰”. These editors spoke about teaching practice in French schools where the presence of some cultural minorities is especially significant: “in these cases we see very original proposals, more than in any other kind of genre”. This coincides with Spanish critic and writer Teresa Duran’s recent observation during a children’s literature congress (October 2006) that the poetry genre nowadays sees a myriad of innovative and plural possibilities, despite the striking indifference that the academic field shows about this.

While talking about mediations with poetry negotiating cultural difference in non-school learning settings, several French and Spanish interviewees¹⁹¹ (3F, 1S and 5S) mentioned quite similar examples of activities that are organized in both French and Spanish socially deprived local communities. One of the interviewees (3Sb) asserted that the organizers of a poetry workshop in a local community centre had introduced her once as a rapper. She then needed to start the poetry activity explaining that she was not a rapper but felt somehow forced to recite a classic poem as if it were the lyrics of a rap song to compensate for the potential audience disappointment. This interviewee

¹⁹⁰ She refers to a number of poems she enumerates previously during the interview to illustrate the kind of openness towards cultural diversity they are considering.

¹⁹¹ These observations are in line with some cultural and educational interventions with poetry and young people that I learned about while looking for poetry currently available for young people outside the school milieu.

explained that the organizers of the workshop reflected a common attitude, also pointed out by French interviewee 5F¹⁹², amongst educational actors who take it for granted that young people coming from mixed cultural origins in socially disadvantaged milieus especially reject classic recitation and dislike traditional poetry forms because they associate them with a cultural and social background that is alien to them. Interviewee 3S recognized that young people who do not connect well with the cultural tradition transmitted by Spanish schools connect especially well with recitation styles that are close to rap or hip hop and poetry with themes that they can relate to. He also added “it is true that people from migrant communities, who sometimes represent an important section of young people in socially disadvantaged areas where I have worked, automatically open their ears to culturally hybrid styles”.

The kind of practice mentioned above aims to nurture the hopes of young people, who sometimes perceive, if only by omission, their cultural background as diminished by the dominance of Western forms. Interviewee 1F explained that issues of social disadvantage and cultural origins are often intermingled, and that in socially deprived local communities the concentration of young people and mediators who empathize with marginalized cultural identities is particularly high.

Cases of practice addressed to young people from cultural minorities constitute the only kind of examples that French and Spanish agents set when asked about what kind of practice best supports young people’s engagement with poetry that embodies a postcolonial condition. However, the issue that remains unresolved with regard to the focus of this research is how existing cultural and pedagogical support for postcolonial readings of poetry could potentially reach out into the wider community. The abovementioned kind of practice is what

¹⁹² This interviewee says that using rap or hip hop as ways to sugar-coat young people’s access to real poetry is a big mistake.

emerges more easily (together with answers like that of interviewee 1F). This leads to the thought that poems articulating cultural difference and taking the form of song lyrics or performances are mainly valued for how they can speak to young people who either share the same roots or at least some similar constituent elements of hybridity articulated by the authors of the poems.

Despite the fact that certain forms of popular culture, which are often culturally hybrid, already appeal to wide audiences, the development of pedagogical strategies allowing more flexibility in the limits of the poetry field seems to be seen mostly as a pedagogical action for social integration, rather than as being interesting for the poetry education of contemporary young people. This illustrates how the attribution of value to diverse poetry forms is linked to how multicultural education or cultural difference is perceived. In turn this depends on the particular sociological circumstances of local contexts. This reveals the existence of attitudes towards poetry education and cultural diversity that can be questioned, according to a postcolonial approach. It can be questioned, for instance, to what extent poetry from non-European heritages is regarded as an instrument addressed to young people from dominated cultures as a step in the ladder towards their integration into the dominant culture. In contrast, the perspective defended by a postcolonial approach to poetry is that literary and educational establishments are able to select as worthy of attention (for all young people) the diverse expressions of cultural heritages created by European citizens of non-European descent. In doing so they recognise these expressions as part of an evolving common cultural capital that takes into account more than just colonial-metropolitan legacies in Europe.

To revitalise the relationship between poetry and youth it also seems important to bridge the lives and cultures of young people and school literary education, “to reduce the distance between street and school” as interviewee 3S put it. Embracing young people’s resistance to poetry and considering young people’s

engagement with varied contemporary forms of poetry might involve accepting the ontological instability of poetry. However, interviewees who were particularly interested in contemporary methods of disseminating poetry (e.g, French interviewee 5F), expressed concern about the fact that even supporting practices that are integrating poetry emerging from slam venues into school education tend to commodify and muffle the cultural difference and social claims that they aim to highlight. In talking about this example, interviewee 4F explained that “the slam has been given media coverage (...) I mean ... even many publishing houses are producing slam anthologies in France (...) slam is been used as a way to involve young people in the recitation and creation of poetry”.

Interviewee 5F was concerned about the need to be attentive to how some of this poetry when becoming part of mainstream practice, could lose its capacity, based on the naturally disruptive force of these forms, for social and cultural transformation. He stressed that “even the best-intentioned alternative practices in poetry education run the risk of being assimilated into dominant trends if educators don’t pay attention to particular issues that help to challenge the current state of things”.

6.8 Summing up. Internationalized frameworks. Conclusions

This closing section consists of a synopsis of reflections about what this research work, in its empirical dimension, affirms and reveals. One aim of this work was to illustrate, with some examples and discussions with informed agents, how poetry can be especially well-suited to encouraging consciousness about cultural difference and to detect which ideas could be impeding such acknowledgement. Some commonalities exist between French and Spanish

poetry currently available for young people that make it suitable for a similar postcolonial analysis. These commonalities entailed the answer to Research Question one; what are the distinctive qualities of poetry written or disseminated in Spanish and French that articulates non-Spanish and non-French cultural heritages and what issues do they foreground for young audiences? They were described in chapter 3 and can be summarised here as a reminder:

1. The use of distinctive words, images, stylistic devices and sound patterns to foreground idiosyncratic understandings of social constructs and to illustrate recurrent concerns.
2. The need to express a sense of cultural displacement or contrast and the longing for a distant land related to the poet's roots.
3. The feelings associated with living in a liminal space of constant cultural negotiation.
4. A social commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity with a specific desire to integrate different ethnic (mainly a mixed-race singularity) and cultural positions within a context marked by white male supremacy.

Research Question two (RQ2) is 'To what extent is this body of poetry represented within Spanish and French poetry that is currently available for young people?' And Research Question three (RQ3) is 'What kind of cultural interventions and pedagogical strategies can support and encourage young people's engagement with these texts?' With regards to these questions, I will summarize the analysis in a comparative way to help me describe normalized structures in the French and Spanish cases explored in this research. Comparing internalized frameworks (Reay 2004) involves clustering the most frequent ideas that emerged in this research concerning the continuities and

discontinuities between the French and Spanish scenarios of poetry for young people with regard to research questions two and three.

6.8.1 Continuities and discontinuities between the Spanish and French scenarios

An educational paradigm that does not discuss the dominance of Western cultural modes of thought and expression in global education (education for cultural diversity) underscores the practice of selecting poetry in France and Spain. Selections of poetry for young people are stamped with an unchallenged desire for the reproduction of established cultural and educational conventions in both these national contexts. The theoretical concern for cultural diversity that traverses Western educational political discourses does not permeate the decisions that inform the dissemination of poetry among young people. Neither is it effectively translated into an intention to enrich and diversify cultural perspectives on poetry. This situation does not help to nurture a context that is open to contemporary poetry forms that bring rhythms and representations from non-European cultural backgrounds to European literature. It preserves unchallenged the prioritisation of poetry's function in education as the quintessential expression of national high-brow culture. Specialist international scholars complain that a conservative point of view seems to prevail in adults' opinions about poetry and children (Styles 1998, Thomas 2007). Similarly, according to the French and Spanish interviewed experts the authority of French and Spanish educational cultural gatekeepersⁱ is perceived as being dominated by, or at least (in the French case) as being significantly influenced by, conservative views about poetry for young people. The authority of educational gatekeepers remains largely unquestioned (but more so in Spain than in France).

6.8.1.1 Concerning RQ 2

- 1- **About the school context** the investigation confirmed the hypothesis that poetry which could be read using a postcolonial approach has little presence in school education in France and almost no presence in Spain. Educational establishments are mostly interested in selecting printed canonical poetry and poetry forms that are usually linked to a national cultural identity for the intellectual diets of young audiences. “Poetry for children has conventionally endeavoured to act as a stepping stone to the national canon” (Watson 2009:202). Further, poetry education for older children is primarily focused on trying to make young people absorb this established canon.
- 2- **About informal learning settings.** Poetry articulating cultural difference circulates more freely in the “many new forms of learning opportunity that characterise the third millennium” (Broadfoot 2000: 357). This poetry circulates more abundantly in France than in Spain, where there are fewer channels available and less cultural and educational interest and support. Young people in Spain and France engage quite frequently, outside the constraints of educational institutions, with varied forms of contemporary poetry¹⁹³ that articulate postcolonial energies. The most accessible expressions emerge from urban cultures, particularly syncretic ones, and take the form of poetry from performed venues like slam contests or verses from rap or hip hop lyrics. Many of these are accessed (and many times reworked) by young people through virtual social communities.

¹⁹³ Many of these forms are on the boundary between poetry and song or poetry and the spoken word; only some would be called poetry by most cultural and educational gatekeepers.

6.8.1.2 Concerning RQ3 What kind of cultural interventions and pedagogical strategies can support and encourage young people's engagement with these texts?

- **About the school context.** Pedagogical practice which supports a postcolonial approach to poetry that expresses the articulation of different cultural heritages cannot be identified. The infrequent presence of poetry that articulates postcolonial energies in school is not supported by pedagogical approaches that valorize the aspects of the poems that are interesting and challenging concerning the cultural difference that they express. A postcolonial approach to poetry is as much an issue of poetry appreciation as it is of critical education in cultural diversity and pedagogical approaches to literary texts. In particular, poetry education tends to either assimilate or erase cultural difference (the Spanish trend) or to reiterate positions in a cultural hierarchy and aggravate distinctions (the French trend).
- **About informal learning settings.** Young people's engagement with contemporary poetry articulating postcolonial energies is generally unregulated, and almost solely supported by communities of peers such as online social networks. In France, cultural activities organized by intermediate structures that support poetry "between two cultures" (as one lesson in a French textbook was called) are not uncommon. In Spain, activities that support the engagement of young people with mixed-descent poetry are almost non-existent. French cultural practice¹⁹⁴ imports ideas from venues and forms that are popular among young people. Particularly, slam poetry is shaping emerging pedagogical approaches that support contemporary culturally hybrid poetry.

¹⁹⁴ Some of which is permeating French school education.

6.8.2 The comparison of the French and the Spanish cases

This research shows that France offers more accessible and relevant “places of enunciation” (Spivak 2003) for poets to address young people, to make their creations public and engaged with by young people, than Spain does. French young people have easier access to expressions of being culturally displaced. They can also feel that these expressions, although many are considered part of young popular culture, are seen as worthy creations that form part of a common cultural capital. Three important differing contextual conditions frame this scenario.

- Educational institutions in France are more committed to the role of literature (and poetry) for young people in articulating the negotiation of cultural identities than they are in Spain.

- Social anxieties, caused by unresolved cultural tensions are more visible in France than in Spain. As a result, French educational and cultural decision-makers see the need to transcend superficial multicultural agendas as more urgent work. However, it is not the socio-educational aspect that makes the French attitude more open to on-going revision of approaches to poetry for young people (despite the persistence of reactionary approaches, as seen at the end of Chapter 5). Instead, it is a general attitude towards perceiving poetry as a relevant and dynamic art expression. This is what makes the French educational context more open to postcolonial approaches to poetry that articulate cultural difference.

- The existence in France (and the absence in Spain) of coordinated efforts that help to bridge young people’s frames of interest and syncretic culture with different kinds of poetry texts and activities. In France, these efforts emerge from solid intermediate structures that actively promote poetry among young

people. In Spain, there is a lack of coordinated effort with enough influence to play a similar role to their French counterparts.

Taking into account this summary, the concept of an internalized framework serves to describe and compare how each of the contexts makes “some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range accepted” (Reay 2004: 432). It illustrates that the conditions that sustain the French framework might allow a limited range of possibilities to be accepted (e.g., the possibility of finding certain types of poetry published in certain kinds of books for young people or disseminated in certain kinds of venues). On the other hand, the Spanish framework makes the same possibilities improbable or inconceivable. In this vein, it can be inferred that in the more dynamic French cultural context the boundaries between the different domains that facilitate young people’s engagement with poetry are more blurred. As a result, the French school system is more dynamic and permeable to ideas and practice (e.g., forms and ways engaged with by young people through more spontaneous venues and channels) supported by intermediate structures than the Spanish one.

6.9 Reflections

Poetry is “at its most powerful, and displays most potential for transformation, when the outward conditions for success are at their least promising” (Wilson 2014:208). Unchallenged attitudes (like ideas about what poetry is and should look like) can hinder the development of practice that takes into account varied French and Spanish speaking cultures. However, culture is not a static concept and cultural values change and develop in different directions. This could be

reflected in the kind of poetry made available to young people. This appears particularly problematic with regard to poetry and childhood, as with regard to poetry and adolescence. This is because poetry for young people has traditionally been seen as playing an important cultural gatekeeping role for national heritages. Future planning for poetry education could not only take into account more culturally diverse corpora but also attend to global and local sociocultural contexts.

Decolonizing Europe's contemporary poetry for young people means recognizing the past and allowing new conceptualizations of it to develop in the present, and challenging institutionally dominant writing positions because "the judgement that something is *poetry* or *good poetry* is nothing to do with what is on the page – it is nothing to do with form: it is a cultural value-judgement exactly equivalent to the decision as to what literature is" (Hunt 2010:20).

Endeavours related to the promotion of poetry require sustainable and long-term commitment. People who have been extensively involved in poetry for young people know that attempts to engage in debates about poetry and young people can never be sufficiently informed. This thesis calls for a continuous debate in which different agents involved in the cultural and educational public sphere should participate. A debate needs to be held about ways of revitalizing poetry for young people that takes into account intercultural social configurations taking place at a global scale in particular local ways. My reflections about poetry and intercultural education aim to stimulate debate at international level. I also seek to promote and increase the relevance of future research into the scarcely developed area of international comparative studies in poetry for young people.

Chapter 7. Linking conclusions with prospective practice

“The subversion of a canon involves evidencing and challenging reading practices and their social articulations (..) it also calls for new proposals for reading practices and alternative creations”¹⁹⁵ (Bessière 2001:159)

An important conclusion of this thesis is to signal the pertinence of dedicating time and resources to working with young people on the contributions to Spanish and French poetry of various colliding cultural heritages. Bearing in mind the insecurities of educators about poetry and intercultural issues, this chapter reflects on practices that might help to revitalize poetry education in this regard. Section 7.1 of this chapter includes discussion with two of the interviewees especially interested in linking previous reflections with prospective practice. Section 7.2 proposes a plan for developing practice in cooperation with different agents involved in the field.

7.1. Encouraging discussion about prospective practice with interviewees

Interviewees French 5F and Spanish 3S are currently involved in developing poetry workshops for young people that relate to this research. The interview discussion of a postcolonial approach to poetry led the two participants to explore prospective practice. French 5F and Spanish 3S have extensive

¹⁹⁵ My translation of « plus qu’un corpus textuel, un canon est un ensemble de pratiques de lecture (avec nombre d’assertions collectives sur les genres, sur l’écriture, sur ce que doivent être la littérature et la lecture), pratiques consacrées par les institutions, notamment à travers des programmes éducatifs et les réseaux de publications. La subversion d’un canon implique donc la mise en évidence de ces pratiques et de leurs articulations sociales »

experience in non-school environments but also conduct workshops in schools at French and Spanish national levels. Their ideas are summarized here and will be taken into account in section 7.2, dedicated to future action.

Like many poetry activists, both these interviewees were poets. According to French 5F his practice with young people often stresses the encounter between French metropolitan and Francophone cultures. The Spanish interviewee had expressed the idea that intercultural poetry in Spanish is especially well-suited to articulating different rhythms and variations of language and had complained that this advantage is not exploited fully in poetry education in Spain. The main interest of the Spanish interviewee for her poetry practice is to engage young people in poetry forms and approaches that emphasize oral aspects of poetry.

The French agent (5F) was coincidentally the author of one of the poems that I selected for exemplary analysis: *Rouge*. He showed me a video-recorded poetry workshop for children and poetry in which he starts talking about the African diaspora's socio-historical aspects. He had used these to describe the context in which some poems were created. He mentioned that getting to know Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* in school as a teenager changed his idea of poetry, and that for this reason he feels in debt to Negritude poets and regularly uses Negritude poems in practice¹⁹⁶. Rather than starting a workshop with a contextualization of the conditions in which the poets write poems, however he said that preferred to introduce a "rhythmic access to poetry"¹⁹⁷ ("accès rythmique à la poésie"). He proposed "to surprise the public's ears" as a good way to start a poetry session with teenagers, making the young people listen to a contemporary recitation or recorded performance. He explained that he had

¹⁹⁶ Césaire has remained "a compass, a reference and an ideal" of inspiration for my poetry and practice.

¹⁹⁷ See transcript in Appendix VI

already done this with his own recitation of a poem like *Rouge*. However, he added that “a video recording of one of his own performances on stage or someone else’s performance would also do (...) video recordings are excellent tools for young people”. This element of sound-surprise is in line with what interviewee 4F had explained about the value in French schools of “poetry brigades”, consisting of poets or performers who erupt into school classes without previous announcement, recite a poem and just leave¹⁹⁸. French 5F also said that he also makes young people engage with performances of other contemporary poets. He made it clear that other “teachers and mediators do not need to be performers themselves to include poetry in performance in poetry practice”. However, he pointed out that most practitioners would benefit from training in poetry recitation techniques. He also mentioned that he was involved in workshops for teachers on performing poetry to help educators reconnect with the sound and body elements in performance. This is something that Spanish interviewee 5S also mentioned, putting forward some examples of workshops being currently developed in Spain.

Interviewee 5F also suggested listening to¹⁹⁹ “audio or video recordings of a less contemporary poem”. He gave the example of one poem by Leon Contrás, “read aloud by the author or by an actor/actress (...) you know there are a lot of recordings available”. 5F explained that these listenings naturally lead a group of teenagers to debate social issues related to cultural oppression. He also asserted that “texts which are not poetry can also help to spur similar debates”. However, he pointed out, “I aim to engage young people with poetry so they can bring home something that stays (...) something about poetry”. His ideas were framed in his understanding of the role of a poetry practitioner “as someone devoted to stressing the value of poetry as a method of expression”.

¹⁹⁸ This is done with the permission of the schools participating in Le Printemps de Poètes and the teachers are aware that this ‘eruption’ is going to happen but not the students

¹⁹⁹ “Des extraits sonores de textes lus par les auteurs ou des comédiens”.

He said that poetry as opposed to most rap and hip hop deals with issues in subtle non-confrontational manners that encourage deep reflection, critical thinking and apprehension of different perspectives by means that are not solely intellectual. However, he recognized that “my recitation style is very influenced by hip hop. I often inflect the recitation of my own poems, and even sometimes my recitation of classic poems, with a bit of rap style”. He does this often with young audiences that don’t seem initially interested in poetry. He added that “young people open their ears to recitations of classic poetry inflected with contemporary rhythms”. For him, rap and hip hop, and slam venues, offer young people the freedom to locate themselves in a wide cultural poetic space in contrast with the narrow space of poetry in school education. He mentioned that he also makes young people reflect on poetry listening and poetry readings through writing activities. For him these help young people to be “more deeply permeated by the poems”. He explained that he uses a method called ALEPH²⁰⁰ that makes young people engage directly in the craft of poetry because this helps with valuing poetry as an art expression: “my standpoint is artistic”. For him this is a good way to convey an understanding of “French as a tool of creation for all those who share this language”.

Interviewee 3S was very enthusiastic and creative but mixed many ideas in a less cohesive sense of her practice. At one point she said, “one way to work with the combination of different cultural heritages in poetry is by showing different styles of recitation”. She commented that she has recited the lyrics of a contemporary song with the intonation of a classic poem and has also put on rap background music and inflected the recitation of a classic poem with a rap style. Later on she explained a different activity, consisting of delivering a

²⁰⁰ The Aleph method <http://www.aleph-ecriture.fr> is a pedagogy for creative writing seeking to link between the student’s experience with the work of others with student’s individual creative writing exercises. Delmaire uses poem’s performances to inspire students for writing exercises « This tends to make young people participate in a creative process, making young people write poems or parts of poems too” .

printed version of a poem that young people would be familiar with, giving them time to undertake a silent reading, and then listening to a version of the same poem in song form. She commented on the particular example of Cuban Jose Martí's *Versos Sencillos*, "Yo soy un hombre sincero", popularized in the song *Guantanamera*. Interviewee 3S was very interested in the idea that "the playfulness of poetry is not childish". She mentioned that adolescents, and not only children, can also be involved in activities and poetry practices that encourage them to play with the rhythm and sound of words and poetry expression in general terms. She pointed out that a ludic option that could help to bridge the existing gap between primary and secondary school is missing. She believes that activities that might seem light-hearted can lead to interesting discussions with teenagers. In this case her approach was the introduction of an unexpected activity. She commented that most people know the song but ignore the original poem from which *Guantanamera* was derived. We discussed how the socio-historical contextualization of Martí's work during this kind of activity could help to foreground the importance of Martí's *Versos Sencillos* with regard to his ideas about a Hispanic-Caribbean identity. She also mentioned the usefulness of video-recorded performances to help to attract the audience's interest commenting that "one needs to acknowledge that our young people belong to a very visual culture".

I also asked these interviewees if our discussions had led them to reflect on different issues in ways that might change their choice of poets or poems, or activities or methods. Both interviewees said that the interview increased their interest in harnessing multicultural energies spread through contemporary poetry venues and channels. They also reported that our conversations reinforced their beliefs about the pertinence of improving young people's exposure to oral modes of poetry. They commented that "official education needs to consider the disconnection between poetry education and

contemporary cultural movements" (5F) but were attentive to the losses this might entail, specifically in the excitement for young people of the disruptive force of these poems. They both agreed on the need to develop practices that make the most of "the revival of a healthy, active and popular poetry scene". They considered that the tension between school poetry and poetry circulating outside the school context should be embraced. 3S also stated: "whereas young culture is syncretic [their dance, music, etc.], the culture transmitted by the school is culturally monolithic". Interviewee 5F thought that the ways non-European inheritances are conveyed in contemporary poetry performance are easier for young people to apprehend than in older poetry and conventional print modes. These interviewees believed that the presence of multimodal expressions of contemporary poetry can create a pedagogical framework for approaching other poems in which postcolonial energies have been assimilated or erased.

7.2. Providing resources and support for educators

"Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives to the world." (Rushdie 1992:394)

In this thesis I have shown that the Internet has made available a dynamic body of high quality contemporary poetry which addresses intercultural issues in a performance mode that is highly engaging and accessible for young people. This body of poetry could be wider and better known if it received more cultural and educational support. This poetry is enjoyed by young people in out-of-school settings and there are practitioners who are developing dynamic methods for working with performance-based poetry in informal learning

workshops, but both aspects are relatively unknown in formal curriculum material, though more apparent in France than in Spain. Teachers in both countries are cautious about using material they are not familiar with and which directly probe cultural tensions routinely experienced by their students. The evidence clearly indicates that there is rich potential for a renewal of poetry education in both countries. This renewal will come by widening the cultural space within which young people might find a more personally meaningful path towards enjoyment and appreciation of a wide range of poetry. This widening of the cultural space represents a significant challenge to established practice in curriculum and pedagogy, one which “calls for new proposals for reading practices and alternative creations”(Bessière 2001:159).

To conclude this thesis I propose:

A. The following research-informed creations (to be developed both in Spain and France but priority could be given to Spain on the first phase).

1. **The creation and curation of a web-based archive of digital recordings** of contemporary intercultural poetry in performance, with links to and guidance about performance venues, channels and ways of reading or/and viewing the poems. The resource could be organize as follows:
 - ✓ Find poems
 - ✓ Get to know the poets, their lives and communities
 - ✓ Go to poetry events
 - ✓ Make the most of it. Suggestions to help enjoy the experience

2. **The creation of an online resource for teachers**, which develops their familiarity with the poems and the poets and their contexts, and encourages them to find their own interests and pleasures in it. Respecting the individuality of each teacher's style and ideas, the focus of training workshops with schoolteachers would be "in finding tasks that work with poems rather than against them" (Smith 2000: 27). This resource would also model methods for working with the curated collection of poems in ways that engage young people in consideration of its content and form, and which lead to the making of fresh connections with poetry in the conventional canon. It can be organized as follows:

- ❖ Poetry performed from here and there, now and then. Highlighting the peculiarities of poetry that is performed.
 - ✓ Thinking about different performing and recitation styles. The resource will provide ideas to work with examples from the on-line curated collection and also to pay attention to traditional and contemporary recitations of poetry from different parts of the world, in different venues and languages.
 - ✓ Thinking about the singularity of each performance. Some activities can explore recordings from the curated collection and some activities can involve teachers (and students later on) in personal tasks such as "what would be your own recitation style?"²⁰¹.
 - ✓ Paying attention to contemporary poets from diverse and often mixed cultural heritages. An activity can explore the figure of the contemporary intercultural performer, poets from mixed cultural roots whose work is not clearly attributable to a single cultural context

²⁰¹ The British resource "all talk" can inspire the creation of activities for this resource: <http://www.btplc.com/BetterFuture/ConnectedSociety/LearningAndSkillsFreeResources/AllTalk/>. The database from "Le Printemps de poètes" offers also valuable know-how about curating an online data base of poetry

of production. Activities can make teachers reflect how nowadays poets can reach audiences from distant locations thanks to the convenience of the Internet and also that some poets often perform in varied locations including their countries or regions of origin and their countries of residence (e.g., Cuba-Spain, Mali-France, Barbados-UK, etc.).

❖ Linking the page and the stage

- ✓ Working with poetry in performance on elements that are not present in print poetry. The guide will make suggestions, such as learning to transcribe performances, aiming to explore elements in performances (body language, sound, texture, intonation, the venue, the poet persona) that don't exist on the page.
- ✓ Working on connections with the school canon. It will focus on the dialogue between poetry traditionally included in school material and poetry in performance included in the online-curated collection. Suggested tasks can focus on coupling poems in print and poetry on the stage according to their social, geographic and historical contextualization.

❖ Connecting poetry with music and other arts

- ✓ Working on the links but also the tensions existing between Rap or hip hop and different forms of poetry. The guide will propose activities aiming to encourage debate about what can be seen as subversive poetry forms and music lyrics.
- ✓ Working with the dialogue between poetry and other arts. Creative activities can engage teachers and students in juxtaposing contemporary and non-contemporary artworks and poems.

3. Teacher education in the form of face to face and/or online workshops, with experienced and beginning teachers, involving poets and poetry practitioners, and developing from the work of the Caribbean Poetry Project and ZAPP (Southern Africa Poetry Project) from the Faculty of Education in Cambridge.

The teacher training would aim to reach out teachers from communities where the presence of minorities is particularly significant but also seek to reach the wide community. Training will familiarize teachers with the use of the curated collection of poetry and the guide. Workshops can serve to obtain useful practical feedback to improve the created resources. Poets (like interviewee 3S or 5F) could conduct part of the training. They could help to convey authenticity to some issues dealt with in the teaching guide. Their presence can highlight the craft of the performance.

B. The dissemination of its conclusions

- Among the international research community interested in poetry for young people and in intercultural issues in literature for young people. For this I aim to write an article in an academic publication.
- Among French and Spanish agents involved in poetry for young people from the different standpoints that I recognized when I selected interviewees. First I will send a private communication to the agents who participated in my research as interviewees. Next, I will write an article for a well-known French magazine distributed at national level through the national network of libraries and schools. They asked me to do so. I have also contacted a few Spanish publications interested in disseminating my conclusions.

The development of poetry and teaching resources could be done in dialogue with emerging initiatives in local and international contexts. Spanish and French research groups contacted for my PhD work showed interest in participating in the development and evaluation of future action with intercultural poetry. Other organizations that I contacted for this research, interested in supporting the development of teacher's training, could help selecting schoolteachers for training workshops. Informing research groups and educational institutions about the conclusions of this thesis will also help to frame the development of future action both at national and international level. Particularly, initiatives like the International Poetry Project²⁰², could be used as a background against which to frame the development and reflection about the practice I proposed on a wider international scale. The support of international institutions such as UNESCO would also be pertinent.

²⁰² An emerging initiative in the Faculty of Education in the University of Cambridge with the cooperation of international agents seeking to increase the presence and recognition of poetry performance and oral traditions in educational contexts.

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